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The pig in Judaism and the cow in Hinduism as constructs for the maintenance and preservation of religious and social identities : a case study in Durban, South Africa

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Title Page

The pig in Judaism and the cow in Hinduism as constructs for the maintenance and preservation of religious and social identities: a case study in Durban, South Africa

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Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Johannesburg 2014

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work written without the assistance of an editor. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

.....	.....
Dr Catherine Burns	brimadevi van Niekerk
Supervisor	Doctoral Candidate

Dedication

For Tobie Cronjé
With all my love and gratitude

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I would like to thank the thirty four Jewish and Hindu participants in Durban without whom this study would not have emerged. They gave generously of their time and thoughts, and helped shape the form and content of this thesis.

The National Research Foundation for supporting this project and for awarding me the prestigious doctoral scholarship. The University of the Witwatersrand for various stipends and completion grants. The Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) for indulging me with the opportunity to conduct this kind of inter-disciplinary research.

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October, 2014

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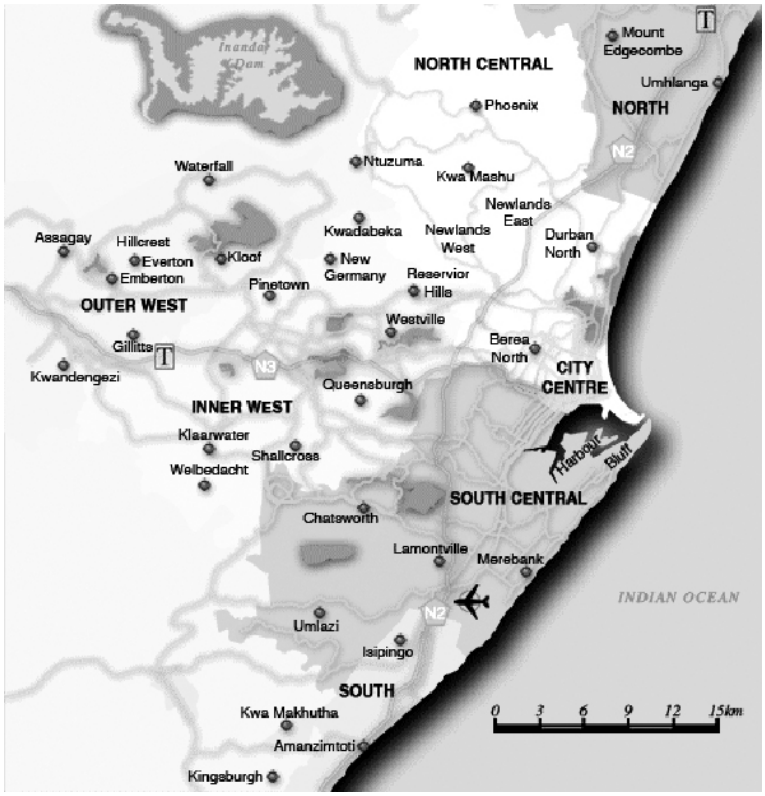
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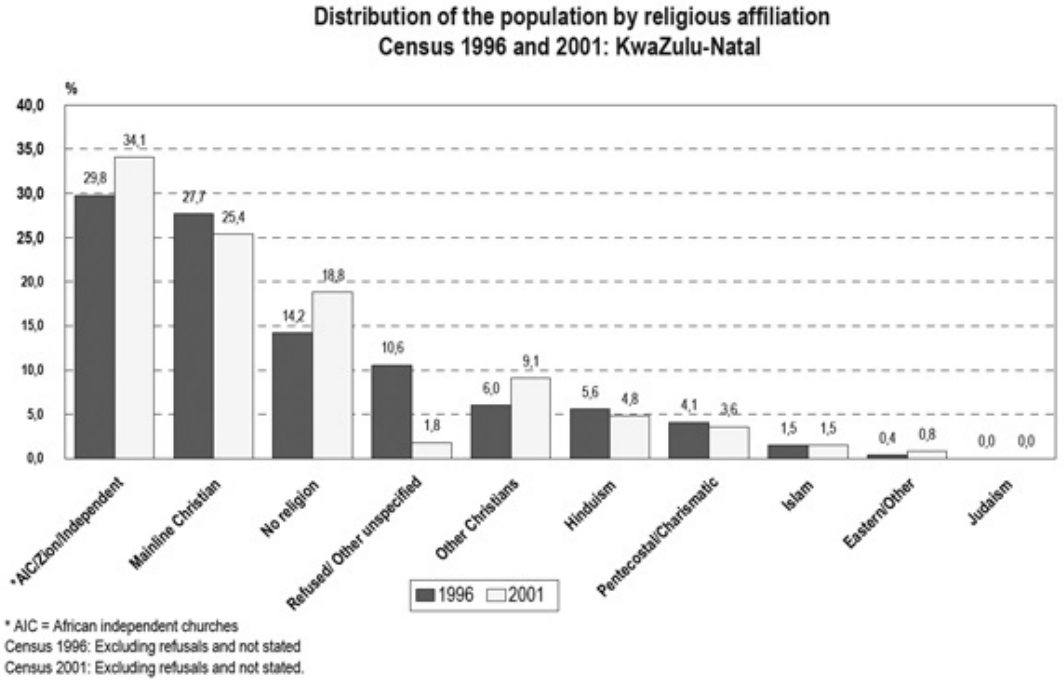
Map



Map of Greater Durban showing the eastern seaboard and the various suburbs where the participants lived.

Available at: http://www.roomsforafrica.com/dest/south-africa/kwazulu-natal/durban.jsp?tab=3. [Accessed: 31 March 2014].

Census Graph



Graph indicating religious affiliation in KwaZulu-Natal. In the 2001 census there were 453 230 Hindus living in the province, and 2964 Jews.

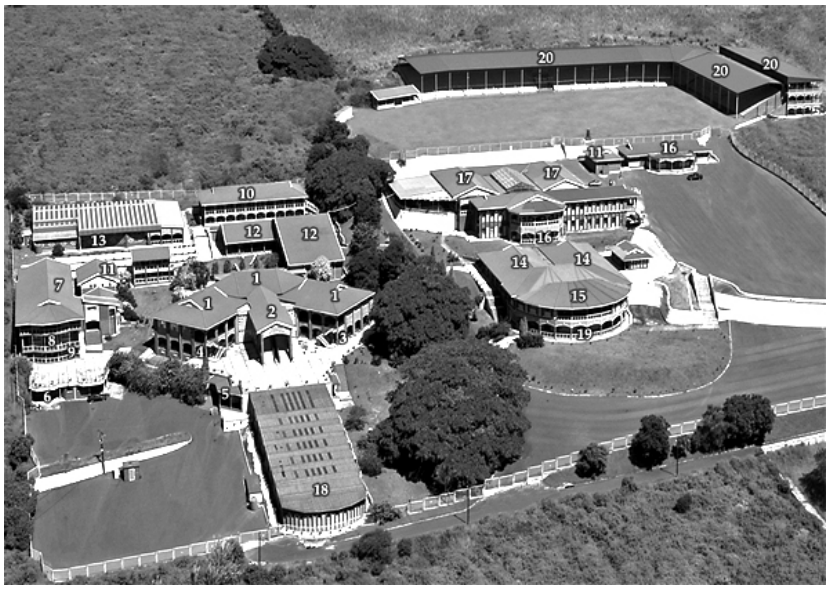
Available at: http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/c2001primtables.asp. [Accessed: 31 March 2014].

Photographs



Photograph of the Orthodox Durban United Hebrew Congregation synagogue, showing a gallery where women are separated from the men below.

Jewish Action: The Magazine of the Orthodox Union. Available at: http://www.ou.org/jewish_action/12/2011/letter_from_south_africa/. [Accessed: 31 March 2014].



Divine Life Society of South Africa. Photograph showing the clean architectural lines of a neo-Hindu place of worship and the entire cultural centre.

Available at: http://sivananda.dls.org.za/Ashrams%20in%20South%20Africa.htm. [Accessed: 31 March 2014].

Various depictions of the Hare Krishna temple



A view of Chatsworth housing with the Hare Krishna temple in the background against a westerly sky

Chatsworthalive.co.za (2007). Available at: http://www.panoramio.com/photo/1037877. [Accessed: 31 March 2014].



A close-up of the temple, depicting its three *Nagara*-style towers.

SA-Venues.com. Photograph. Available at: http://www.sa-venues.com/attractionskzn/chatsworth.php. [Accessed: 31 March 2014].



The sanctum sanctorum of the temple is a marble-floored octagonal hall with gilded mouldings and sparkling frescoes, filled with light and the aroma of incense. The ceilings depict larger-than-life pictures of Krishna painted in the style of Da Vinci or Vermeer, held in gilt-edged frames.

ISKCON ZA-official site of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Available at: http://namahatta.wordpress.com/iskcon-temples/iskcon-durban/. [Accessed: 31 March 2014].



A close-up of a painting on the ceiling of the temple depicting Krishna as a child-god in a pastoral setting with cows.

ISKCON ZA-official site of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Available at: http://www.namahatta.co.za/. [Accessed: 31 March 2014].

Chapter 1

> Hinduism at its heart prohibits the eating of meat of any kind. The sacredness of life...is revered and so all life is revered.[1]

> The two things that offend most Jews are swastikas and pigs; holocaust and pork.[2]

Introduction

This thesis is a sociological and religious studies investigation of the persistence of minority identities in a cross-cultural modern state. South Africa,[3] as a tri-continental society, with a population originating from Africa, Europe and Asia, is an ideal place to open up such a discussion. Using the qualitative research method, the study is based on 34 interviews with Jewish and Hindu practitioners in Durban in order to provide a sociological perspective of their dietary exclusions, notably the pig and the cow, respectively, and how these are maintained in order to preserve their religious and social identities.

I have chosen to study these particular dietary practices because the prohibitions of both groups are an integral part of their beliefs and practices, and act as markers that maintain group cohesiveness and distinguish them from other groups.

While this study adds to the existing debates in the literature on food and the inter-related institutions attached to food, as well as the role of food in the maintenance of religious identities, it contributes perhaps not new but adjusted theory on how to view food avoidances among Hindus and Jews in Durban. It becomes evident in the data that Mary Douglas' (1966) theory of purity and pollution, while sufficient to explain the prohibition of the pig, requires amendment in order to fully explain the place of the cow in the daily and cultic practices of Hindus. What the thesis will also show is how Émile Durkheim's (1915) definition of religion is also not comprehensive enough to understand intermarriage and its effect on group cohesiveness for Jews, nor to understand conversion and the debilitating effect this has on group identity for Hindus. It is hoped that this work will inspire more research on the subject of food, religion, and identity in Durban, or open unexplored areas within this subject.

The research in this study focuses, then, on how the dietary practices of Jews and Hindus in their everyday lives symbolise the local identity of the two groups in Durban, and how their dietary prohibitions are practical expressions of how they define themselves and how they draw distinctions between themselves and others. I am aware that the search for the origins of such prohibitions in both these religions is a futile and unfulfilling exercise, and prefer to remain with my basic concern, which is to account for the persistence and efficacy of such avoidances as they are practised in contemporary Durban.

The question that arises is, why is it that animals that are perfectly fit for human consumption, like the flesh of the pig and the cow, are excluded from the eating practices of certain religious groups? What is the relationship between man[4] and his needs, and how is this explained by culture and nature, religion and animals? What emerged from this case study in Durban is that the pig is forbidden for consumption by Jews because it does not fit into the usual classification of edible animals, and is therefore deemed disgusting and despicable. While the cow is forbidden for Hindus, it is nevertheless viewed with approval and associated with life and creation, thus being revered as the giver of something and in particular, milk and its by-products. Thus cow "avoidance" translates into a religious idea that is constructed symbolically around ritual and observance. While the cow has a utilitarian value, the pig is seen as something out of place, and yet the exclusion of both these animals in their respective systems has the same function, having the efficacy of ritual and separation.

The study also addresses a lacuna presented in the literature for existing studies of food that relate to the problem of avoidance. More specifically, this relates to Douglas' (1966) work around concepts of purity and pollution surrounding the abominable pig. Douglas examines the prohibition of the pig using evidence gathered from religious texts to locate her study. Had Douglas conducted her study with a living Jewish community somewhere in the world where Jews have scattered, she would have taken her own admonitions into account about studying the pig in its multiple dimensions of thought and activity. The evidence she gives appears to translate too neatly into the staid biblical context, and as such cannot account for change in religious practice, the issues of modernity, the problems of keeping kosher, and the effects inter-marriage has on preserving dietary prohibitions.

This study seeks to correct this weakness, which was also identified by S. J. Tambiah (1969) and Ralph Bulmer (1967), by locating the understanding of food avoidances in a particular social context, namely Durban, and asking the Hindu and Jewish participants themselves what they think and feel,

as opposed to relying purely on textual evidence. This study is also important in that it provides insights into specific communities, thus increasing our understanding of the fundamental features of the religion and culture of the Jews and Hindus in Durban.

This chapter will state the research problem, set out the research questions and objectives, and show the significance of this study. I will set out the theories, particularly those of Émile Durkheim (1915) and Mary Douglas (1966), which I will use to filter the data and observations and steer the analytical process used to form a coherent explanation for the behaviour of the participants. This chapter explains why Durban was chosen as a place to locate the study, how the information was collected, who the participants that provided it were, and what the findings of the thesis were. Issues that arose from personal considerations such as my dress when participating in religious functions are also discussed. I begin by clarifying some of the terms used in this thesis.

Explanation of terms

A note on the use of the word god

Throughout this thesis I write the word "god" with a lower-case "g" no matter which divinity in Hinduism and Judaism is intended. This avoids the theological problem of making a decision between monotheism and henotheism, true gods and the false gods attributed to paganism. Writing god with a small "g" also avoids privileging one god over another. I use the word god to refer to supernatural agency, the transcendent realm, wholly other, or the ultimate reality, or whatever the participants in this study call that which has power over human beings and nature. The term, therefore, includes deities as well.

Who are the Hindus in this study?

The Hindus in this study are third, fourth and fifth generation descendants of Indian indentured labourers who arrived in Durban between 1860 and 1911, as well as the descendants of a smaller number of Indians who paid their passages to Durban in the same period. Although I speak of these Hindus collectively, they are by no means an homogenous group; they show marked differences in devotional orientations and class, as well as regionally derived and caste predilections.

A new wave of Indian immigrants has been coming to Durban since the advent of democracy in South Africa; they include professionals and information technology specialists (Parekh: 2003 Preface). However, these Indians are not represented in this study.

It should be made clear that while most Hindus are Indian, not all Indians are Hindus.

Who are the Jews in this study?

The Jews in this study are the descendants of Jews who immigrated to South Africa in three waves. The first consisted of British and German Jews who arrived between 1806 and 1880. The second wave – ancestors of the clear majority of Jews in South Africa today – came from Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1920. More particularly, they came from territories in the Pale of Settlement and were made up of Poles, Byelo-Russians, and Lithuanians. The much smaller third wave consisted of refugees from Nazi Germany who arrived between 1933 and 1938. The first Jews arrived in Natal in 1880, a few years after the first Indians had arrived.

In more recent decades a small number of Jews have immigrated to South Africa from Israel, but they are not included in this study.

How the word pig is used in this thesis

The pig is any of the animals in the genus *Sus*, within the Suidae family of even-toed ungulates. While pig could therefore include the domestic pig's ancestor, the common Eurasian wild boar, in this study it refers only to the domestic pig (*Sus scrofa domesticus)*. Male pigs are called boars, or sometimes hogs, and females are called sows. In this thesis I use the word pig in its broad sense, since the biblical injunction not to eat this animal refers in all instances to the pig, without distinguishing between the male or female animal. The Jewish participants in this study also referred throughout their interviews to the animal as a pig. The flesh of the pig, once prepared for consumption, is called pork and never referred to as the animal itself. In this thesis, I refer in general to the injunction against consumption of the pig, but when speaking about pig as food for consumption I generally refer to it as pork.

How the word cow is used in this thesis

Cattle are members of the genus *Bos*, and are the most common type of large domesticated ungulates. Zebu cattle, also called hump-backed cattle (*Bos primigenius indicus*), which are not the same as the European taurine variety we are more familiar with, are the cattle most frequently found in India and referred to in the literature. However, in Durban, all species of cattle are regarded as sacred.

Perhaps because there is no singular form of the word cattle, which refers to all members of the group whether male, female, or juvenile, cattle are colloquially often referred to as cows, although correctly speaking cows are adult female cattle. Other kinds of cattle are known as bulls, steers, or calves, as the case may be. The Hindu participants in this study all referred to the cow as something they would not eat, even though it would be equally unthinkable for them to eat the flesh of a bull or calf. In the literature, it is the cow that is spoken of, though it is understood that the flesh of all cattle is in fact polluting and rendered inedible.

In this study I use cow alongside pig in the topic so as to avoid the awkward construction of having to refer to all species of domesticated ungulates, male and female. It also scans better in the title.

Research Question

Durban is a city of more than three and a half million people. It is the largest eastern seaboard city in South Africa, the largest port city in Africa, and the ninth largest port in the world. The vast majority of its inhabitants are Zulu[5] but it is also the largest city of people of Indian origin outside India, who number just under a million inhabitants. A little less than half of the Indians in Durban have remained Hindus.[6] Among the minority white population is a very small community of Jews, numbering fewer than two thousand people.[7] Hindus and Jews have remained as clearly distinguishable groups. They both have strict dietary prohibitions as part of their beliefs, and both groups have a complex but meticulous system of dietary practices to maintain these prohibitions. The question I investigated in Durban was whether the strict food laws of the Jews and Hindus, and their consequent practices, have served to keep the two groups as distinct religious communities. I also look at the question of what symbolic meaning is derived from their proscriptions and

corresponding prescriptions, and the complementary relationship between these dictates, and how such practices contribute to the solidarity of each group, namely, the Hindus and Jews.

Significance of study

There are many explorations of food in the literature that present the problem of this thesis, namely the attitude of man towards animals and the symbolic significance of food, some of which are located among the Bemba, the Lele, the Andamans, the Thai, the Karam, the Trinidadians, the south Indians, the Maghrebian Jews in France, and the Jews of Copenhagen. However, there are no studies located among the Hindus and Jews in Durban, South Africa that give us insight into the problem of food avoidances. This study seeks to address this omission by investigating the role of food and dietary prohibitions of two religions in the maintenance of religious identities amongst the Jews and Hindus in Durban.

This study is also of necessity a comparison of these two religions – something that has not been done for this region of the world. Indeed, comparative religious studies as a field has not juxtaposed these two religious practices in depth. While there are considerable differences between the groups, there are also elements they have in common, which therefore makes this a compelling reason to study their respective religions. Both groups in this study are diasporas, originating for Jews in Eastern Europe (and before that Israel, where their forefathers had lived, and the place they aspire to mythically return to), and for Hindus from the Indian subcontinent. Their core commonalities relate to how I define religion in this thesis, that is, having beliefs and practices which have core prohibitions placed on what they may and may not eat. Judaism is a monotheistic religion, while Hinduism, a henotheism, reveals a diversity of beliefs, rituals and institutions, yet what is common to both these religions is theism. This study has found that Jews left their ancestral lands, where they had escaped pogroms and oppression, and found themselves in a privileged position in Durban, aligning themselves with the host society but keeping their beliefs and practices fundamentally intact. This thesis will also show that Hindus left their villages in India to take up employment in Durban, and found themselves subjected to various forms of oppression which affected how they reconstructed their identities and replanted their beliefs and practices in Durban. As a result of these oppressive conditions many Hindus, according to the testimonies of the some Hindu participants in this study, converted to Christianity, but a large number retained their beliefs and practices.

Why Durban?

The study was carried out in the coastal city of Durban, in the KwaZulu Natal province of South Africa, between 2010 and 2011. It is a religiously diverse city where Christians, Muslims and African Traditionalists live alongside Hindus and Jews. Although I was originally from Durban's Hindu community, I was by now no longer a part of that community and thus saw myself as a stranger among the Jews and Hindus I wished to study. I felt that this would allow me to take on the role of participant-observer without difficulty.

I particularly chose Durban because it has the largest Hindu population in South Africa, although this consideration was to a small extent counterbalanced by the fact that it has a smaller community of Jews than either Johannesburg or Cape Town. Generally, it appeared to be an ideal place to study religion, culture and identity, and to show how these groups practice their religions while living alongside each other. It seemed, then, to be the most logical place to do a comparative study between Hinduism and Judaism.

The attachment of Hindus to the city of Durban dates back 150 years, when the ancestors of the majority of today's inhabitants arrived as indentured labourers. However, when I made a preliminary enquiry at the Documentation Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, before beginning my fieldwork proper, about the dietary practices of Hindus in Durban, I discovered a dearth of information in the *Indian Opinion*, *Graphic* and *Leader* newspapers, which chronicled Indian political, religious and social history. What I did find out, though, was that there were old Hindu families in Durban whose ancestors had contributed to the building of temples and the inception of Hindu practices. These links to a rich Hindu past confirmed for me the importance of Durban as the location for my study.

My first discussions with Jews also revealed that ancestral links were important for the continuation of their religious practices, and that the descendants of the first Jewish inhabitants of Durban are as involved today with questions of Jewish practice and identity as were their forebears. Old Jewish families, synagogues, and access to Jewish events and festivals added to the attractiveness of Durban as the location for my study of Jews.

What emerged clearly during my interviews was a strong attachment to Durban by both groups, though Jews did show a far greater attachment to, and longing for, their biblical homeland, Israel,

even if this manifested itself in a largely symbolic way. Memories of the motherland, and the myth of their return there, were strongly articulated by the Jewish participants in this study.

Nevertheless, for both Jews and Hindus living in Durban, a city outside their countries of origin, religion takes on an increased significance as a source of identity. For both groups, their religions have become a source of identity, and it is through the practice of their religions that they achieve cultural stability; they know who they are and what they are.

I chose to compare Hindus and Jews because, despite obvious differences between them, there are also significant similarities. Both are immigrant religions living in Durban: Hindus come from an eastern religious system originating in India, and Jews come from the Mosaic tradition which has its birthplace in the Middle East. And while both religions have their cultural peculiarities, the way in which each group conducts its daily practice, observes its festivals and holidays, and negotiates its time and place, would in many instances have a familiarity about it for members of the other group.

On the other hand, the two groups can be distinguished from one another along lines of origin, nationality, religion, language, group membership and phenotypical features. This range of attributes signifies their distinct identities, and both groups evinced a strong intention to preserve their respective traditions and identities.

While Jews and Hindus share the same city space, their social relationships in the past were largely determined by the political conditions that prevailed during the apartheid era. Residence was segregated along racial, and not religious or ethnic lines. Yet even now, with the ending of apartheid, neither group aspires to assimilation, and they remain thoroughly segregated through their religious practices, with Jews, for example, frequently living close to their synagogues in areas such as Overport and, more recently, Umhlanga. Social relations between the groups, and inter-marriage, are rare.

Although certain common cultural practices have arisen as a result of education, economic mobility, and the freedoms people now enjoy following the ending of apartheid, Hindus and Jews in Durban continue to practice and celebrate their different religions. Each group maintains its individuality, and while each is aware of its similarities with the other group, they are highly conscious of the differences which separate them. While geographic boundaries no longer aid us in finding out where

Jews or Hindus live, there are boundaries – invisible yet present – which keep each group distinctly separate and intact.

Despite this, there is a range of interpersonal relationships which take place in the workplace and at public institutions such as schools, universities, and hospitals, but these are seldom replicated in the homes of either group.

Findings

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Hindu Indians worshipping a number of different deities, and 14 Jews from Orthodox and Reform congregations. As researcher I was also a participant observer of a number of religious ceremonies and practices.

What emerged from these interviews was a handful of key concepts and themes which both groups regarded as essential elements of their respective faiths. The respective prohibitions – Hindus not allowed to eat the cow, Jews the pig – were each central tenets of the two religions, to the extent that they each define their respective religions. It became clear that these specific food prohibitions were not only sufficient, but necessary, for the creation, maintenance and preservation of each of the groups' religions. Interestingly, while both groups prohibit the consumption of particular animals, the two religions' prohibitions are for very different reasons, and based on quite different rationales.

What also clearly emerged was that while many of the same concepts were applicable to both religions – cleanliness, home and ritual space, festivals and holy days, calendar, dress, community, social services, ancestors, language, group hostility, assimilation, inter-marriage, conversion, and ties with mother country – there were also differences in the way these concepts were practised, and what they meant. For example, for Hindus, ritual cleanliness of home, body and temple is achieved not only by washing to ensure an absence of pathogens, but also through spiritual cleanliness, achieved by not killing or eating living organisms. For Jews, ritual cleanliness is achieved by applying the complex rules of *kashrut* to achieve a kosher state for self, home and community.

In many respects it is not possible to separate ideas such as home, food prohibitions, cleanliness and ritual, because for both groups they are all so closely tied together that the one cannot exist without the other. For example, the home is central because that is where cleaning rituals begin, and food is

a critical part of these rituals. It is also from the cleansed home that the physically cleansed practitioners move on to the temple or synagogue.

The large number of elements making up religious practice for both Jews and Hindus can be grouped under three broad headings: food and proscriptions and prescriptions, cultic practices (being the means of ensuring efficacy in avoiding the prohibited), and identity.

The first of these categories deals with food in relation to the home, and food in relation to the synagogue, in the case of Jews, or temple in the case of Hindus. Following from this is the intricately related issue of food and cleanliness, since prohibited foods would defile and make unclean both home and place of worship.

The second category, cultic practice, is closely linked to those times set aside for festivals and other calendar items which deal with special occasions of either fasting and privation or celebration. In the case of Jews, weekly Sabbath rituals are essential, as are the various holy days spread throughout the year. Hindus observe a month of fasting prior to the festival of lights, or Diwali, but may also, for different practitioners, include specific days of the week set aside for fasting by not eating any flesh.

Daily ritual practice includes rules for when and how to pray, and may be linked to dress and the ablutions that must be carried out as part of the act of dressing appropriately. Included in these practices are rules about how to prepare at home for attendance at synagogue or temple, and how to move between these two places.

Identity, perhaps the broadest of the three headings, encompasses community, inter-group relations, and relationship to the homeland or place of origin.

The sense of community felt by adherents to Judaism and Hinduism relies on a number of elements ranging from their respective notions of exclusivity and chosenness, reverence for ancestors and other elements of racial memory, the perception that their respective religious languages were an important part of their spirituality, and the provision of social services for less fortunate members of their own communities as well as for people outside the community. Memory of the Holocaust, to an intense degree, is a core part of the sense of identity felt by every one of the Jews I interviewed.

Flowing from this sense of community is the fraught issue of inter-group relations. Respondents

spoke extensively about their attitudes to mixing with people of other faiths, expressing a common fear that their children might assimilate with the broader culture around them through inter-marriage or even conversion. In this regard, a hostility to other groups frequently manifested itself – not to individuals they might encounter at work, but to those practices which could undermine their cohesiveness as a group. Food taboos proved to be central to this concern, and it was very clear that prohibitions against eating the pig and the cow by Jews and Hindus, respectively, together with other dietary restrictions, were one of the main ways in which the two groups sought to maintain their separate identities. A number of Jewish participant asked rhetorically what would be left of their Jewishness if they were no longer to view the pig as abominable. Furthermore, a number of Jewish and Hindu participants admitted that while their children may occasionally eat either pork or beef outside the home, this would not be tolerated inside the home.

The relationship to what Jewish participants regarded as their homeland, Israel, and to what Hindus less intensely regarded as their place of origin, India, also emerged as important elements of their respective senses of identity. For Hindus, the issues were about where their roots were, and their connections to their ancestors. For Jews, their connections to Israel were religious and, even for those who were not religious, political in the form of a strong adherence to Zionism.

How the data was categorised

The data I collected during my fieldwork in Durban was in the form of audio recordings of lengthy, in-depth interviews I conducted with 34 Jewish and Hindu participants, as well as a journal of observations kept throughout my interactions with Jews and Hindus in Durban. Most of this data, by the very nature of my topic and the research I was doing, fell automatically into certain categories: I was asking the practitioners of Judaism and Hinduism whether they adhered to their religious injunctions against eating, respectively, the pig and the cow. These adherents belonged to various traditions or divisions within these religions – Orthodox and Reform for the Jews, Bhakti and Sanathanist, and neo-Hindu groups, among the Hindus – and filled various hierarchical levels in their respective organisations, from priest or swami or rabbi to office-bearers to ordinary congregants.

Thus, religion, Judaism and Hinduism, the pig and the cow and the proscriptions on the eating of these animals, swami and rabbi, and the different traditions within the two religions, were pre-determined categories. Then, during my reading of the academic literature, other conceptual categories emerged that seemed to me to make the most sense of the data I had collected. The

most important of these were purity and pollution, from which sub-categories of dirt and clean emerged.

Without the help of a computer software package to do qualitative data analysis, after the interviews were transcribed verbatim, each interview was combed through manually, reading and re-reading, and the themes were noted. All mannerisms, facial expressions and gestures of the participants were noted while the interviews took place. For Jews, the recurrent themes of ordering of space and time through the extensive practices of *kashrut* and Sabbath emerged as the two most important categories around which the proscription of the pig is maintained. For the maintenance of Jewish community and identity marriage became, with *kashrut* and Sabbath, the most discernible category.

Central to my categorisation of the Hindu data, it emerged that the bigger issues were derived from their concerns about the problem of conversion, why consumption of the cow is avoided, and how these inform the practice of vegetarianism. Other categories include the complex cultic practices of Hindus, festivals, and ablutions and correct clothing.

What emerges very clearly from this outline of the way I categorised the data is that one set of categories had to be worked out to make sense of the data provided by my Hindu participants, and a different set of categories were required for the Jewish participants. I therefore of necessity had to place the important chapter relating to the data from Jews and Hindus into separate chapters, Chapter 4 for Hindus and Chapter 5 for Jews, thus facilitating my discussion of such disparate findings.

My personal background

The reason I wanted to do this study was personal. I was born in an Indian home where I was raised as a Hindu in Durban. My parents always said that all religions possess the truth. So I had come to believe, from a very early age, in the virtues of all religions. At 18, I joined an Anglican Church choir on the advice of my singing teacher. I soon became involved in the life of the church which led to my conversion to Christianity. Following my curiosity about my new-found religion, I took up the study of theology. After that I accepted a post at the national broadcaster where I, together with a few others, produced and presented the first multi-faith programmes for television and later radio. It was while I worked on radio that I developed a feeling for dialogue among the different South

African religions, and where the idea for this study was born. The more I discovered the truth in every religion, the less attachment I felt to any specific religious persuasion. I have a deep curiosity about religion, and have developed a deep respect for, and desire to work with, all religions. I now practice as neither a Hindu nor as a Christian, and have become content in my dual mysticism and agnosticism.

Clothing matters

On the morning after I had arrived in Durban to begin my fieldwork I received a concerned call from a friend of my sister. As a devotee of a Hindu group calling themselves Divine Life, she had arranged for me to attend a ritual ceremony that afternoon where the ashes of the dead would be disposed of. She wanted to warn me that jeans, pants, and other forms of Western dress would not be allowed at the temple where the ceremony was to take place.

Having been given such short notice about the appropriate dress code, and not knowing where to find the shops where I could purchase clothing appropriate for this occasion, I called on my sister for help. There was no time to do a preliminary reconnaissance; I needed the clothes urgently. We agreed that I should shop for a Punjabi suit, which was common attire for these occasions, and this helped to narrow the choices I had to make, given the limited time available.

The women at the shops in downtown Durban were helpful and knowledgeable about these garments; fortunately so, since even though I am Indian, I wasn't accustomed to making such purchases. Even though we had narrowed the field to Punjabis, I soon realised that there were many types available, all differing in their design, colour, and type of fabric. Adding to this bewildering range of choices, I also needed to find an outfit that would be suitable for all the occasions I was likely to attend during the following few months.

Eventually we singled out two outfits. They were reasonably neutral, and would, we thought, allow me to circulate among all the Hindu groups I was planning to visit. I had wanted the garment to look attractive so that I looked not only appropriately demure, but a little stylish as well. In addition, I had wanted my choice of clothes to indicate my natural affinity with the groups I was visiting without revealing my lack of knowledge about such items of clothing. I also hadn't wanted the clothes to make me stand out or appear too different from the people I was observing. Quite a tall order.

The various colours, styles, designs, and patterns made it difficult to choose. I asked for a garment made of home-spun cotton, since this would be an authentic fabric that would have been comfortable to wear in the Durban heat. However, being of a slightly fuller figure, I was advised not to wear cotton, but to take a softer and more lightweight fabric that would enhance my curves without making me look unattractively large. I submitted to the advice, and bought one red Punjabi (for the grander festivals that I would attend during the course of my fieldwork), and another outfit in more subdued colours that was perfectly suited to that afternoon's temple ceremony.

The advice was sound. At the temple I felt adequately dressed and blended in without trouble, and no one saw me as an outsider looking in. Perhaps the only time I gave myself away was just before I entered one of the temples and I had to remove my shoes. I was confused about where to put them, to the apparent confusion of a young man who had just removed his.

A few weeks later, on a cold, rainy morning in early August 2010, I drove to Phoenix, north of Durban, to meet Swami Venkatesan at the Ramakrishna Centre. Even though I now owned two Punjabis, this was a non-religious occasion and I decided not to wear such formal attire. I was nevertheless very conscious of how I would dress in the presence of such holiness, and spent a fair bit of my waking morning deciding on what to wear. I chose a black dress with a neat neckline and a hem that fell below my knees, a little black jersey to cover my arms and protect me from the slight cold, a pair of black sheer stockings teamed with a pair of black – what my mother would call sensible – shoes. I felt dressed for the part, a wimple short of playing the nun.

During most of the interview I kept pulling my dress down to mid-calf, not wanting to expose my already covered legs in the presence of the swami, who was dressed in a traditional priestly saffron robe. Towards the end I asked him about the dress of the congregation, but before doing that I expressed my own anxiety about the appropriateness of the clothes I was wearing for the interview. He assured me they were not out of place. Feeling relieved, I stopped pulling at my dress which by now, I imagine, would have stretched a few inches, and continued talking to him, oblivious at last of my attire.

How the research was conducted

As the researcher I invited each of the potential participants to take part in my research study. I explained to the participants, both over the phone and in many cases with notes sent by e-mail as

well, that before they decided whether they wanted to take part they should understand why I was doing this research and what it would involve. I said they should take the time to ask any question they may have before I started, and that the interview could last between two to three hours. I further explained that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time without explanation. Once they had agreed to an interview I arranged to meet them at an appropriate date and time. Then, when I arrived at each interview, I again explained the procedure to the participant and again informed them about the study. At this point in the interview I also asked their permission to audio record the interview.

The participants were selected purposefully. My initial link with Durban Jews began with a preliminary enquiry with the Johannesburg Jewish Council, who then put me in touch with the rabbis of the Reform and Orthodox synagogues in Durban. One rabbi then referred me to a contact person at the Durban Jewish Centre, who helped me get in touch with their members. Like a snowball, one contact led to another, and I very quickly was able to get in touch with the 14 Jews that I planned to interview. They covered a spectrum of people, starting from the top of the hierarchy with rabbis, and including every level below that down to ordinary lay members.

The way I chose my Hindu interviewees was to work through the Hindu Maha Sabha, which is the Hindu national coordinating body. This organisation put me in touch with the main groups within Hinduism. I was also personally acquainted with some of the more prominent Hindu groups in Durban, and so knew where to start my enquiries. With this group, as with the Jews, I was looking for a full spectrum of practitioners, and easily found the twenty participants I required.

I chose to use my Indian maiden surname, Govender, particularly when working with the Hindus in this work. My accent is a very clear, English-speaking one, and that often confused people when I arrived for the interview as they were expecting a white person. For example, I, as a matter of form, always called the participant the day before the interview to confirm our appointment for the following day, and on one such call the daughter-in-law of the participant in this study answered the phone and when the participant wanted to know who it was before taking the phone, she said, “I think it is a white woman”. So to avoid this kind of confusion about my identity as researcher I chose to use a name that was familiar to the Hindus. Also, the question of my own beliefs and practices came up regularly in my interviews, particularly with the Hindus. I am of Indian extraction, look Indian, my hair is black, and I have Hershey-brown skin, and at face value I am taken to be Hindu.

This is understandable given that it is the religion of my ancestors and my parents and so naturally it would be my ascribed religious proclivity.

Many of the Hare Krishnas I worked with, though I did not necessarily interview all of them, said that it was no coincidence that I was sent to them – that Krishna has a purpose for me. As part of my observations, I spent a day with a group of Hare Krishnas in Isipingo, south of Durban, who were preparing the meal (*Prasad*) which was to be served at the end of one of the evenings of celebration I later attended to mark the birth of Krishna (*Janmastami*). My observations took the form of actually "doing"; I got my hands into making the food with the other devotees while also chatting informally; patting the disks for *roti*, and fashioning the *kachori* – all this had to be done with extreme precision to meet the demands of the chief cook, who gave the instructions and supervised a production line. The party of people who gathered for this ritualised food preparation, who were mostly women (the men were involved in the driving and fetching of food and utensils), asked me to consider myself very fortunate that I was assisting in the preparation of food for their Lord Krishna, which they considered to be the highest ideal.

I had a fear that I might lose analytical perspective when I encountered people who were of the same background as myself; in my interviews I was conscious of taking nothing for granted, and asked about everything, not assuming any prior knowledge, even where some aspects of what they spoke about were familiar to me as someone who had been culturally steeped in things Hindu and Indian. I was also considered a "native" by many of my participants, especially when I worked among Indians.

To the Jewish participants my own religious orientation, which came up frequently as an issue with Hindus, usually at the end of the interview when they expressed a curiosity about my personal religious persuasion, was less troublesome. It was clear that I wasn't a Jew, and my own religious orientation didn't seem to bother them as much. I had wondered after the interviews whether this was due to the fact that to the Jews practice and the interpretation of their history in a pragmatic way is far more important than simply holding intellectual beliefs about their religion – a point, I recall, that William Robertson Smith (1894) made.

I established a good working rapport with my participants. Initially, when setting up interviews, I was asked how long they would take, and I would reply that I needed two to three hours of their time. Sometimes there was a sigh, suggesting that this might be excessive. However, I was granted the

interviews, and most of them lasted longer than this, often running to three or four hours. This was often because once the interview was underway the participant would pause to confess they had never expressed their feelings about these subjects that were so close to them – partly because no one had ever asked them before. I had learned from one or two of my early interviews never to switch off my recording device after I thought the official interview had ended, since I was often offered a cup of tea, and a number of profound thoughts emerged during these social interactions. I therefore learned to keep the recorder on to the very end. Because of this close relationship I formed with my participants (especially since they were letting me in to some of their deepest and most private thoughts), I found it very necessary when writing up my thesis to first write about them using their real names so as to recall those elements of my interactions with them that were not noted or recorded. Once the thesis was complete, I then changed their names to give them anonymity.

Theoretical framework

Before commencing fieldwork, I studied theory in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology that would potentially guide the analytical process and help to develop a theoretical framework that would filter the data and my observations into an interpretation that would form a coherent explanation of what people do, what people say, what is done to them, and the worlds they find themselves in. I assumed that any group calling itself Hindu or Jewish would be as straight forward and neatly bounded as the Durkheimian (1915) definition of religion I was carrying in my head. While aspects of Durkheim's definition are present, such as beliefs and practices and the consequences of avoidance for group cohesiveness, I encountered all varieties and interpretations of practice, and different degrees of spiritual fervour. And so I searched for a framework that would make sense of the diversity of practice in the religious spectrum.

The attitude elicited by symbols representing the sacred is one of deep respect. This is not only seen in human behaviour in the presence of such symbols, but also in the fact that sacred things are always set apart by interdiction and isolated by ritual practices (Durkheim 1915/1947:47; O'Dea 1966:20). In setting apart sacred things, religion draws lines distinguishing that which is pure or right from that which is impure or transgressive, and these acts serve as a divinely legitimated source for sentiments that bind together the members of a social group. Religions, then, taboo certain foods to exclude these foods from consumption; this practice is informed by religious beliefs and the culture of the group. By making the pig abominable, Jews make it unfit for consumption. By sanctifying the

cow, Hindus render it inedible. Whether sanctified or abominable, both animals in their respective religions are made taboo. How are we to understand what these exclusions mean and the role they play in the formation of religious identities? How, too, are we to understand the rules of avoidance and how they make "a visible public recognition of its boundaries" (Douglas 1966:159 – question mine)?

I use Mary Douglas's theory on pollution to analyse the exclusion of the pig and the cow in the diets of Jews and Hindus, respectively. Like myth and ritual systems, argues Mary Douglas (1966: 35), "food systems are codes wherein the patterns by which a culture 'sees' are embedded". In her theory on purity, she explains the imposition of dietary and other rules in terms of a sequence of ideas revolving around dirt: Dirt, says Douglas (1975:113), "is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements". That which is unclean or polluted, then, does not conform and is therefore out of place. Douglas understands ritual prohibitions as protecting established categories. Pollution is triggered when a category boundary or distinction is violated (Douglas 1975:113). Ritual prescriptions and proscriptions are understood as protecting and defending the correct definition, the relevant discriminations, and the proper order of social categories. Using the Jewish dietary laws as her prime example, Douglas argues that it is culture, not nature, that determines what is dangerous and to be avoided. The forbiddance of certain foods for a group is the response to the idea that dirt creates a situation of danger and encroachment, and is used as a way of defending their cultural system.

However, while the pig and the cow can be classified as out of place for both religious groups, the cow for Hindus is further differentiated and suggests another approach to pollution is required. That which is made taboo and therefore not to be consumed by Hindus, is also made sacred and to be respected. In his writing about primitive religion, Mircea Eliade (1958:14-15) makes the following observation about this apparent contradiction:

> The ambivalence of the sacred is not only in the psychological order (in that it attracts or repels), but also in the order of values; the sacred is at once "sacred" and "defiled".

The paradox found in this statement makes no clear distinction between sanctity and uncleanness, and may be applied to the cow for Hindus. Douglas (1966:8) has simplified this intractable case in explaining that, "...the universe is divided between things and actions which are subject to

restriction, and others which are not; among the restrictions some are intended to protect divinity from profanation, and others to protect the profane from the dangerous intrusion of divinity. Sacred rules are thus merely hedging divinity off, and uncleanness is the two way danger of contact with divinity".

Food in religion, however, is not only about its proscriptions and exclusions. It is also about the corresponding prescriptions of food, which includes what is selected for consumption and how. If that which is proscribed is seen as a matter "out of place", then that which is prescribed must be seen as matter in place. However, Douglas' theory of pollution is not adequate to explain the efficacy of prohibitions; that is, the theory does not account for the prescriptions that come out of the mandatory proscriptions. I add a theory of order to Douglas' theory of pollution by reversing her theory of pollution. To this end, I suggest that in the sacred world there is order and where there is order there is a system. Order is the by-product of a systematic arrangement and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves the acceptance and obeying of laws and rules for the appropriate elements. That which is clean or unpolluted, then, conforms, and is therefore in place. Ritual prescriptions for food and eating are meticulously practiced and guarded, and these categories are protected. The prescription of foods, and their accompanying rules and regulations, provides order and safety for the group and serves to protect it as a cultural system.

This thesis takes up a time-honoured problem of explaining the relationship of social groups to natural species, which leads to two different systems: nature, on the one hand, and culture on the other. The question this raises is: what is the relationship of man to things? More fundamentally, what one can ask is, what induces humans to divide things and to classify and to categorise things in the manner they do?

Émile Durkehim and Marcel Mauss ([1903] 1963) have worked out a theory of classification which has enabled me to see the world as it is constituted by the people themselves in this study, and to assimilate their distinctive categories. They point out two types of classifications: technological classifications – for example, night and day, hot and cold, that exist independently in nature; and social and religious relations, which relate to the various ways in which humans classify things and their relationships to the world at large, and that do not exist independently in nature and are not innate in humans. This second set of classifications is devised, or created from scratch, by the people themselves. The question the authors then ask is – how did people learn to classify the world in this way? Their answer is that people classify the world of things according to the way they had grouped

themselves in their own societies, in moieties and clans, which were divisions within the tribal whole. Social and religious relations in the world around them, and indeed in the universe as a whole, were then classified in a similar fashion: friend or enemy, holy or profane, polluted or clean. In other words, the greater social world, like their tribe, was viewed as something whole, but whose parts could be classified in a similar manner to the way their own societies were classified.

Durkheim and Mauss are clear that this system of classifying things is not restricted to primitive societies: all classifications drawn up by humans, including modern scientific systems of classification, follow naturally from these original attempts to organise and make sense of the world and things in the world.

Durkheim's (1915) definition of religion provides me with a framework to interpret the phenomena of the two religions being studied. Although the definition was intended for a primitive society and may have certain restrictions in the context of contemporary Durban, it is useful in understanding the core features of the religions I am studying. For Durkheim (1915:47):

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

In Durkheim's definition of religion, "sacred beings are separated beings. That which characterizes them is that there is a break of continuity between them and the profane beings". Cultic rites, therefore, are indispensable in maintaining separation. Because religious people are separated, the way in which separation is maintained is through certain practices which forbid the mixing of sacred and profane categories. This, argues Durkheim (1915: 299-300) is why the religious are confined to "forbidding certain ways of acting" and they appear in the "form of interdictions".

This opposition between the sacred and the profane and the requisite interdictions or taboos for the observant is Durkheim's (1915) formula for social integration. Rules of separation are the characteristic traits of the sacred and all that is religious stands in contradistinction to the profane. While Durkheim's definition is very appropriate to explain the phenomena between the two religious groups of this study, it may not take into account social change and the response of religion to modernity. For Jews the problem of inter-marriage and the effects it has on group cohesiveness cannot be accounted for by Durkheim's definition. For Hindus too, while the definition is a useful tool to understand how sacred and profane categories work in enhancing separation and

distinctness, the definition cannot account for the problems of conversion and the effects this has had on group cohesiveness.

Nevertheless, the definition provides the foundational elements in understanding the basic phenomena constituting the religion of the Jews and the Hindus.

I use the concept of culture in the same sense that Geertz (1973:5) means it, denoting "meaning" and "significance" to be those "webs of significance" that man "has spun". In his explanation of the cultures of human beings, Geertz (ibid.) encourages the researcher to engage in a method of "thick description". Not only should one describe what happens but one should say what people intend by what happens. When one takes into account the element of meaning, the significance of the physical motion, then interpreting action can be quite different. So, it is not enough, he argues, to simply describe the structure of the tribe or clan, the bare elements of ritual, or to say, for example, that Muslims fast in the month of Ramadan. The task is to discover meanings and intentions behind what people do and the significance of all of life and thought in their rituals, structures, and beliefs.

Having outlined the broad processes of this thesis, what follows deals with specific aspects of the way dietary prohibitions function, and the effects of such prohibitions in the creation and maintenance of religious and social identities among the Hindus and Jews in this study.

In chapter 2, I review the literature of this thesis, beginning with the foundational studies on the role of food in bringing together social institutions. I then show how the focus changed in studies that abandoned the practicalities of food as it is associated with social production and consumption, and focused instead on preparation, classification and combination of food. In the 1960s, a substantial body of literature appeared which sought to bridge these approaches by focusing on the problems of food avoidance by highlighting animal categories and classification. Through contemporary studies in the literature I show how change in society and the effects of modernity have made an impact on dietary prohibitions and the meaning it has for communities and their social relationships. The subject of the definition of religion and the historical use of the word taboo, is taken up in this chapter as well.

Chapter 3 is comprised of two sections. The first describes the diverse group of Hindus: what historical circumstances prompted them to migrate, how their beliefs and practices are reproduced in their new surroundings during and after indenture, and how the cow becomes inviolable for

Hindus and continues as a practice through their complex personal and public cultic lives in which rules regarding purity and pollution, and vegetarianism, complement such a prohibition.

The second section outlines the background of the Jews who arrived in Durban, and how their religion is established and maintained. Being more homogenous in beliefs and practices, and keeping the commandment on pig prohibition, I show how through the extensive ordering of space and time, and the maintenance of community, Jews are able to retain group boundaries.

How dietary restrictions are formed around the exclusion of the cow by Hindus in Durban, and act as markers of differentiation, is the subject of Chapter 4. The following questions are raised: How does refraining from eating certain foods, accompanied by a given set of religious practices, express and reinforce the values of this religious community? How flexible are these practices? Are there sanctions placed on those who do violate the practice of the avoidance on the cow? Are they in any way made to feel lesser Hindus if they do not adhere to the proscriptions? This chapter shows what the Hindu practitioners themselves have to say about the prohibition on eating the cow, and how group purity and identity is protected and maintained.

In Chapter 5 I show how dietary practices, which are built around the exclusion of the pig, are used by the Jewish participants in the study in the construction and maintenance of their identities. I examine what is allowed and what is not allowed in the home and outside the home through their extensive daily practices of *kashrut,* and the weekly observance of Sabbath. I then look at community and the effects of inter-marriage on group identity.

I conclude that despite the differences in the various factors affecting the settlement and reproduction of their religions in Durban, the prohibition of the pig for Jews and the cow for Hindus are necessary and important for the maintenance and preservation of their religious and social identities.

Endnotes

[1] Mudaliar, Sivan. 29th June 2010, p7. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[2] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p10. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[3] The country South Africa came into existence in 1910 when the British colonies of Natal and the Cape, and the Boer republics, the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, were joined as one country. In this thesis, as a matter of convenience, where South Africa in the period before 1910 is mentioned, it refers to the geographical areas which at the time were in fact part of either the colonies or the republics.

[4] I use the word man throughout the thesis to refer to human beings in general and not as a word distinguishing male from female.
[5] According to SouthAfrica.info, 11.6 million isiZulu-speakers in South Africa were counted in the 2001 census, of which 77.8% live in KwaZulu-Natal. Available at: http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/language.htm#isizulu. [Accessed: 3 April 2014].
[6] According to Census 2001, 453 230 Hindus lived in KwaZulu-Natal. Primary tables Kwazulu-Natal: Census 1996 and 2001 compared. Available at: http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/c2001primtables.asp. [Accessed: 31 March 2014].
[7] According to Census 2001, 2964 Jews lived in KwaZulu-Natal (ibid.). According to the participants in this study, they may not even amount to 2000.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The study of food has taken two directions; following the pioneering foundations set in the work by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1933), Bronislaw Malinowski (1935), and Audrey Isabel Richards (1939), sociologists and anthropologists have examined the role of food in the social organisation, or following Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966), have examined food as a cultural system of categories and meanings. In the 1960s an important set of work emerged which sought to bridge these two approaches and focussed its attention on the problems of food avoidance paying attention to animal categories and classification. The proponents of this approach are Edmund Leach (1964), Mary Douglas (1966), Ralph Bulmer (1967), Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah (1969), Arjun Appadurai (1981), and R. S. Khare (1976). My own work fits here looking at how the avoidance of certain foods, namely the pig and the cow, in a particular social context, among the Hindus and Jews in Durban, acts as a code symbolising the way in which these two communities view themselves in relation to insiders and outsiders.

However, contemporary studies in the literature have shown how change in society and the effects of modernity have made an impact on dietary prohibitions and the meaning it has for communities and their social relationships. These ideas are reflected in the work of Aisha Khan (1994), Andrew Buckser (1999), Abbebe Kifleyesus (2002), and Joelle Bahloul (1995). The changing social worlds of Trinidad, Copenhagen, France, and Argobba, reflected in these works are relevant for this study as well.

Foundational Studies

Bronislaw Malinowski developed a particular brand in “functionalist theory” of social organisation and the research conducted by him set precedents which became established as standard practice for all field research in social anthropology. By pitching his tent in the middle of the Trobriand village and observing its inhabitants directly and learning the language in its colloquial form, Malinowski changed the face of methodology. His predecessors who collected material artificially through “good informants” (Frazer 1914 and Tylor 1871) based their theories on the description of customs and

habits of primitive tribes. Malinowski found himself describing a way of life through participant observation which proved a good way to obtain rich, valuable data. This new method of data collection gave insight into their economy, social system, religion, and magic – all related to their horticulture – and the purposive nature of food in the physiological and psychological well-being of the Trobrianders. For example, the complex system of gift exchange which dominates the disposal of the harvest is a major theme in the maintenance and preservation of intergroup relationships in Trobriand society (Malinowski 1935:186-217). The harvest gift operates at different levels; a harvest gift from a man to his sister's husband validates the legitimacy of this marriage; it also validates the political superiority of the sister's husband, and lastly; it expresses the rights of the children to their mother's brother. The most important interests of the Trobrianders, then, are concerned with giving and keeping of yams and it is the alimentary needs of the group that largely determine the relationship between its members.

Malinowski's analysis of Trobriand society is important for this thesis in that it shows the functional interconnections between the related institutions and the role that food plays in such relationships. What is perhaps more important for my own study is that Malinowski has shown that human beings, in whatever stage of culture, never completely obliterate spiritual preoccupations from their economic activities. And although *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (Malinowski 1935:xiiii) chronicles a small community that was "unknown and untouched by Europeans", the principles of Malinowski's methodology of participant observation remain relevant and applicable to my own work in a large-scale society such as Durban. Malinowski (1935:454) has pointed out that fieldwork must always consist of three "classes of evidence", namely numerical and informational data of tangible evidence, the "imponderabilia of actual life" which must be collected and recorded, and data on language.

This thesis is more modest in its approach in that while it puts to use the first two classes of evidence in data collection among the Jews and Hindus in Durban, the linguistic evidence is lacking because English is used throughout as the lingua franca. Apart from asking the participants of this study whether or not they speak their mother-tongue there is no analysis of the other languages spoken except for English. This contrasts with Malinowski who dedicated the entire second volume of *Coral Gardens and their Magic* to linguistic evidence.

As a disciple of Malinowski, Audrey Isabel Richards followed in his footsteps, only this time her monograph articulates the single subject of food, and its importance and centrality to human culture. In her fieldwork among the Bemba, based on material collected during two expeditions

between 1930 and 1934, Richards observed in *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* (1939) their economic activities, their cooking, eating and distributing customs, and how these function and contribute to the continuity of the social system as a whole. She discusses the 'symbolism of cooked food' and the way a transaction of food acted as an indicator of their social relations. In a particular feature of the prescribed etiquette between the groom and his wife's family, Richards writes of this instance: "the giving and receiving of cooked food has become symbolic of the legal or economic relationship which entails it"; and she continues, "the preparation of porridge and relish is the woman's most unusual way of expressing the correct kinship sentiment towards her different male relatives" (1939:127).

Richards (1939:62) does take up the subject of food taboos among the Bemba. However, the taboo as ritual avoidance of food does not affect the Bemba as a whole. Most food taboos are related to magical thought and are exercised by the individual except in the case of the chief and pregnant women. The latter refrain from eating bush-buck for fear of birthing a child with stripes. Similarly, the chief avoids the flesh of the bush-pig because it darts from side to side which may disturb his judgments and may cause his behaviour to be unfocused. Unlike the Jews and the Hindus of Durban in this study, the Bemba do not have a particular class of food that is tabooed permanently to the whole community. What might be suggested here is not the taboo itself but the relationship to food in general and the meaning it has in determining the correct relationship with the individual and his community.

Richards' work is important for my own study in that it lays the foundations of the social and cultural aspects of food and eating. More importantly, her study inspires my own in terms of relations and sentiments; symbols express social structure, and what the Bemba eat and with whom expresses this relationship. Viewed through the act of the preparation of porridge, one learns how its function gives meaning to what may appear as meaningless to the uninitiated. By describing and analysing her observation of a woman preparing porridge and also her engagement in a range of other activities related to the domestic economy and local organisation, Richards is able to characterise the rights and obligations of the relationship that emerges from the giving of food and similar acts, and how these express and reinforce the social relationships upon which the stability of the whole system of the Bemba depends. It is clear from this monograph that people do more with food than just eat it; it is cultivated, cooked, distributed, exchanged, and used as a way of ordering relationships. Thus, by moving beyond a mere description of a set of institutions, Richards (ibid.:405) imparts meaning and symbolism into everyday Bemba practices, and in doing so, engages the reader

with her insightful observations and careful correlations of the "sociological aspects" of diet and the "cultural determinants of food and feeding".

Similarly, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's (1933) monograph on the Andaman Islanders in the Bay of Bengal, between the years 1906 to 1908, forsakes the search for the origins and history of a tribe that the evolutionary anthropologists twenty years before him paid attention to, and focuses instead on the meaning and function that things in culture – customary gestures, ritual actions, symbolic objects and myths – express in human life. Like his contemporaries, Radcliffe-Brown (1933:ix) was interested in the problem and nature of social integration as an "adaptive and integrative mechanism" and has treated his subject with deep and intensive investigation. It is clear from this study that for the Andamans the principal social activity is the obtaining of food and it is around food and the notions of food, including the animals used for food, that the Andamans "organise themselves" in a manner that is done "with respect" or in other words, "with ritual precautions" (ibid.:271).

What Radcliffe-Brown demonstrates is that the ritual customs of the Islanders are mechanisms by which their social organisation is maintained and given confirmation. He links their beliefs with the "sentiments" generated by them that hold the Andamans to their respective roles, which in turn keep the wheels of social order turning, thus taking seriously the idea of religion and society. Therefore, while the concept of social structure was his basic premise, the meaning of ritual acts was inextricably linked to how he thought about societies and the behaviour of human beings. What appears to be missing when he discusses food taboos among the Andaman Islanders, which he argues is about inculcating respect for those who were older than oneself in such a community, is that there is no explanation why some foods, as opposed to others, should be included in these taboos.

Under the influence of Radcliffe-Brown and the structural-functionalist approach, M. N. Srinivas (1952) published *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*. Srinivas used Radcliffe-Brown's idea of "ritual idiom" to analyse the complex and pervasive ideas of pollution and purity underlying Coorg culture and, indeed, all Hindu religious and social life. His descriptions of the flora and fauna, temples and homes, feuds and festivals, dynasties and deities, are all purposefully aimed to show how a place can contribute to the maintenance and continuation of an elaborate and distinct way of religious and social life. Srinivas (1952:1-23) argues that Coorg is a tiny province in south India and that its isolation and inaccessibility is due to the steep mountains, dense forests and heavy rainfall which act as natural and almost impermeable boundaries. What Srinivas presents us

with is a rather unusual and perhaps extreme case of a geography and natural habitat of a place and how it contributes to the upkeep of Coorg life, which shows no sign of outside influences and change. In this study which is based in Durban, I have seen how, despite the hot and humid weather, Indian women will still wear a silk sari (silk is a hot fabric as opposed to cotton) to a wedding because it is the appropriate choice of fabric for the occasion and not simply a response to the weather. Similarly, even among the not-so-orthodox Jewish women participants of this study who complained how difficult it is to be modestly dressed to Shul in hot Durban, they still maintained a fair degree of modesty, in varying degrees, in how they covered up their arms and shoulders.

However, the importance of Srinivas' work lies in the fact that his ideas of pollution and dirt, together with those of Franz Steiner (1956) on taboo, have influenced the work of Mary Douglas (1966). As Brahmin and Jew respectively, each has an understanding of the problems of pollution and cleanness, and this has important theoretical dimensions for my own work discussed below.

In summary, then, the functional approach is not just a reaction against the evolutionary and diffusionist methods of looking at primitive society. These latter two methods based their evidence on collected histories and artefacts and largely concerned themselves with the question of origins which were presented in a purely descriptive manner, which we now know is not only conjectural and imperfect but misleading as well. The functional approach, on the other hand, is one that changed the way we are able to look at the problem of food and society. Its method of first-hand observation became the catchword in anthropology and this shift in approach meant that social institutions were studied "as they actually *function* in a living society, and in relation to the fundamental cultural needs they satisfy" (Richards 1932[2004]:20-21). Richards defines "cultural needs" here following Malinowski as "a body of needs which must be fulfilled if the group is to survive" (ibid.).

The principles of such an approach are adopted in this work in the form of face-to-face interviews in the field with observant members of the Jewish and Hindu communities. However, the approach is not able to account for those practices in each of these communities where foods that are available and edible are nevertheless avoided. What these practices mean is that in each case a symbolic realm is created around the foods that are avoided or tabooed. This symbolic realm has the dual purpose of separating practitioners of each of the religions from non-members, and at the same time binding them together with their own members. While the functional approach is able to see the relationship between things, it is limited in its ability to explain symbols and meaning. In

subsequent discussion of the literature, elaborate new theories have been proposed using systems of categorisation and classification to better understand the meaning and significance attached to food and avoidance.

Theoretical Dimensions

To relate food and the consequences of food choices to notions of personal and religious identification, it is necessary to outline how food enters into the dynamic of culture – a dynamic that includes motives of acceptance and avoidance, attraction and repulsion, and festival and celebration. However, when Jews and Hindus in Durban avoid the pig and the cow respectively for consumption – even though these foods are edible and available – to the extent that these foods are made abominable, then we are dealing with a powerful symbolic dynamic that becomes associated with how each group becomes identified with such avoidances and how food is used to build and maintain their social relationships. To understand how such avoidances of food develop this power of identification it will be useful to examine the insights arising out of those studies that use the structuralist approach in the literature.

While the functionalist approach to food was to examine the different components in social institutions and how they fitted together, its practitioners were often engaged in looking for deeper meaning and symbols. However, the structuralists do not focus upon the "practicalities and the social processes involved in producing, allocating and consuming food", since their "gaze is directed towards the rules and conventions that govern the ways in which food items are classified, prepared and combined with each other" (Beardsworth & Keil 1997:61).

Two theorists from the French School exemplify this approach, namely, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) and Roland Barthes (1961). In *The Culinary Triangle*, Lévi-Strauss (1966), having examined various cooking techniques, concludes that food preparation can be analysed as a triangular semantic field whose three points correspond respectively to the raw, the cooked, and the rotted, which is further explained in terms of the relationship between culture and nature as a universal feature in human thought. The cooked is seen as having been transformed culturally whereas the rotted decays in its natural transformation. What Lévi-Strauss (1966:595) intends showing is "how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure – or else resigns itself, still unconsciously, to revealing its contradictions".

Roland Barthes (1961) explains how food acts as a system of communication and provides a body of images that mark eating situations. Barthes is interested in "human communication" and "because human communication always implies a system of signification, that is, a body of discrete signs standing out from a mass of different materials", he suggests that in dealing with cultural objects such as clothing and food, sociology must "structure these objects before trying to find out what society does with them". For, he says, "what society does with them is precisely to structure them in order to make use of them" (Barthes 1961:31-32). In showing "not that which is" but "that which signifies" Barthes (ibid.:31) calls for the reconstruction of "systems, syntaxes ("menus"), and styles ("diets") no longer in an empirical but in a semantic way".

Both these theorists, Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, present an abstract model of food and cooking and tastes and preferences for food, and as such the studies are not located in a specific culture. Although most of the examples given by Barthes make reference to examples in the context of France such as the Brandy of Napoleon and *pain de mie,* and the data cited by Lévi-Strauss, from the Caingang of Brazil or the Guayaki of Paraguay, are collected from his anthropological armchair without having ventured out and gathered empirical data himself, suggests that the theoretical assumptions offered are based on semantics at such a deep level that the more obvious aspects of human life, people, and the more immediate "communicable dimensions of social action," to use Jack Goody's (1982:25) phrase, are missing. The sociological interconnections of social relations is neglected or non-existent. Furthermore, without a background in linguistics I am somewhat at a loss with this approach and feel completely out of my depth, especially when Lévi-Strauss delves into the human mind.

Although various writers in the literature (Goody 1982 and Cohen 1976) have criticised the method used by Lévi-Strauss, it was Adrienne Lehrer (1972) who questioned the relevance of this approach in an article focussing on the cooking vocabularies and the culinary triangle of Lévi-Strauss. Lehrer showed that although Lévi-Strauss is correct in making universal statements about cooking, the data she presents only partially supports the theory of his culinary triangle. By asking people of different languages and different orientations towards food – those noted for their cuisine (French, Chinese) and those not noted for their cuisine (Navajo, Jacaltec, Yoruba, Amharic) and she adds the English, German, and Japanese – Lehrer discovers how each of these groups structure the fields of the raw, the cooked, and the rotted differently, with inclusions and exclusions in their particular languages. What her data suggests is that not all languages have the same structure in cooking concepts and

such universal claims as the one made by Lévi-Strauss would have to be subjected to empirical testing.

Food avoidances and the taxonomic classification of animals

In the literature, a book which has suffered from academic neglect (Needham 1963), presents an essay on the analytical notions of classification in sociological enquiry. This important book, a product of the *Année Sociologique* school written jointly by Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss in 1903, was translated from the French to English as *Primitive Classification* only in 1963, and is "virtually unknown to the majority of professional anthropologists today" (Needham 1963:ix-x). Needham suggests that the reasons for its obscurity could be that it was buried in an "old periodical" or that its initial publication in French limited English-only readers from making its acquaintance. However, the essay provides illuminating insights into the fundamental question as to why humans are induced to divide things and to classify and categorise, and the general relationship of man to things. It has, therefore, brought much-needed clarification to the way I examine the question of how certain foods become excluded for consumption and the consequences of exclusions.

Contrary to what Frazer and others have said, that primitive people created divisions among themselves, and separated themselves from others, on the basis of the way the world around them was ordered, or the way they had classified the world and things in it, Durkheim and Mauss (1963) argue that it is the other way around.

The authors point out that while what they call technological classifications, exist independently in nature (night and day, hot and cold, for example) with regard to social and religious relations, the various ways in which humans classify things and their relationships to the world at large do not exist independently in nature, and nor are they innate in humans: these classifications are devised, or created from scratch, by the people themselves. The question the authors then ask is – how did people learn to classify the world in this way? Their answer is that people classified the world of things according to the way they had grouped themselves in their own societies, in moieties and clans, which were divisions within the tribal whole. Social and religious relations in the world around them, and indeed in the universe as whole, were then classified in a similar fashion: friend or enemy, holy or profane, polluted or clean. In other words, the greater social world, like their tribe, was viewed as something whole, but whose parts could be classified in a similar manner to the way their own societies were classified.

Durkheim and Mauss are clear that this system of classifying things is not restricted to primitive societies: all classifications drawn up by humans, including modern scientific systems of classification, follow naturally from these original attempts to organise and make sense of the world and things in the world. Having established this larger picture of how things in the world work, I shall now show a set of studies that use this approach to examine forbidden foods that were undertaken by Mary Douglas (1966), Edmund Leach (1964), Ralph Bulmer (1967) and S. J. Tambiah (1969), and which are discussed below.

Studies on food classifications in the literature

Nineteenth century scholarship, as seen in the work of James G. Frazer, Robertson Smith and Emile Durkheim, placed much emphasis on symbolism attached to notions of purity, pollution, and defilement in primitive religions. However, anthropologists in the early part of the twentieth century paid little attention to the subject. It was only in the 1960s that the topic was given its rightful place as evidenced in the work of Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966). Louis Dumont, in that same year, published *Homo Hierarchicus*, in which he treated the subject of purity and pollution in the context of the complex caste system of the Hindus in India. What both these studies show is that the concepts of purity and pollution cannot be understood in isolation within a particular religious system but only within the framework of a total structure of thought. For Douglas, therefore, the emphasis has been on the sacred texts and rituals and the semantic ordering of categories to show how the Jews divide the world into sacred and profane categories relative to concepts of purity and pollution.

Mary Douglas (1966:vii) takes up food avoidance and food taboos and its accompanying "gestures of separation, classifying and cleansing" in religion as a subject in itself but within a larger social system. In her book, *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas argues that the classification of nature and the body reflects society's ideology about itself. Her main argument consists in accounting for pollution and the classification of impurities which she does by locating her discussion on food prohibitions among the Hebrews in the Old Testament. In this system of classification, animals that do not "fit in" are deemed unsuitable for consumption, and include among others, maritime animals without fins and, the most notable example, the pig. This list of similar exclusions is given by observant Jewish participants in this study. The pig, she argues, has cloven hooves but does not chew the cud and is therefore seen as not belonging to a category. This, then, is what makes it

polluting. The connection between the order of society and the order in the arrangement of classificatory systems is crucial for understanding Douglas' theory of pollution. The phenomena that do not fit in, and that are seen as anomalies, must be taken care of ideologically lest they contaminate the entire classification system. If this is not done it threatens the order of society, for the order in nature has to mirror the order of society.

In her treatment of the anomaly of the pig, Douglas rids us of seeing dirt as pathogens and bacterial transmissions – a nineteenth century discovery – which was sometimes given as a reason for the avoidance of this food. However, the trichinosis worm found in pork was not observed until 1828 and was considered harmless to humans until 1860 (Douglas 1966:30; Simoons 1978:179). While hygienic and medical reasons have been offered from the perspective of what William James (1922) has termed "medical materialism" in justifying religious attitudes to food, it is clear that what Douglas is saying, together with the evidence gleaned from my data, suggests otherwise. It was made very clear to me by the Jewish participants of this study that the flesh of the pig is sweet and the smell of bacon cooking is very tempting, and a few revealed that they have eaten this culinary item of food. However, their rejection of the flesh of the pig lies not in a dislike of the way it tastes. Perhaps Douglas has the explanation for this in her conception of the role of dirt and its relationship to food.

Dirt, according to Douglas, is "a matter out of place", having two conditions: one, "a set of ordered relations", and two, "a contravention of that order". "Dirt then is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is a by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. The idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity" (ibid:35).

One can recognise from this how rejected elements of an ordered system work in the way in which participants of this study view their places of worship and their homes; shoes are not dirty in themselves but Hindus will leave them outside upon entering a temple; food is not dirty in itself but to observant Hindus on a high fast day, meat is considered unclean food in their kitchens; for Jews, milk and meat should never be stored in the same refrigerator; dish cloths used for milk dishes are never used for meat dishes; similarly, blue plates reserved for milk and cheese consumption are never placed with white plates from which meat and chicken are eaten. What these examples attest

to is that “our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications” (Douglas 1966:36).

In an ordered system in which certain foods are avoided, defilement is never an isolated affair as Douglas (1966:41) has pointed out throughout *Purity and Danger;* it must be examined in the total structure of thought in a culture whose central principles, “boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation”. In her chapter on the abominations of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, on which her classifications of the forbidden pig are based, Douglas relates the idea of abomination to holiness, pointing out that every injunction in these texts is prefaced by the commandment to be holy (ibid.:49).The structuralist mindset of Douglas is able to see the patterned arrangements. Accepting the root word of holy as “set apart”, she formulates an argument to suggest that this holiness requires individuals, referring to Israelites, to conform to the class to which they belong. As such, holiness requires that things should not be confused with things that are not holy, hence profane. Furthermore, she explains, holiness means “keeping distinct the categories of creation”, which therefore involves “correct definition, discrimination and order” (Douglas 1966:53). The dietary laws, she argues, “merely develop the metaphor of holiness on the same lines” (ibid.:54).

The association between that which is forbidden to the Israelites and holiness, links up with the problem of this thesis, and gives insight as to why the pig persists as an abomination and the meaning this has for present-day Jews in Durban. It is a pity that Douglas bases her evidence on the social world of the Israelites as gleaned from textual evidence. Would her study not have been richer if it were located in real-life people of a Jewish community somewhere in the world where Jews have scattered, to take seriously her own admonitions about examining the avoidance of the pig in its multiple dimensions of thought and activity? The evidence she gives translates too neatly as it appears in a biblicist way; Douglas does not account for change in religious practice, the problems of keeping kosher, and the effects inter-marriage has on preserving dietary prohibitions. Furthermore, where there are proscriptions, on what the religiously observant may or may not do, there are prescriptions, of what is to be practiced, adhered to, eaten, with whom and how, and this means delving into the whole elaborate system which is put into place by both Hindus and Jews in Durban; the examination of these complexities is not taken up by Douglas.

However, when Douglas’ theory of pollution is applied to the avoidance placed on the cow among Hindus in Durban, the limitations of her theory become clear. It would appear that her theory of pollution applies only to the cow when killed, at which point the cow is unclean because it becomes

a “matter out of place”. Douglas’ theory is insufficient here because the cow presents a conundrum as it cannot be used to explain why the cow is not polluting when alive. In fact, it is sanctified and revered and its by-products have ritual and material benefits for Hindu practitioners.

The cow, then, when viewed in terms of Douglas’ theory of pollution, is a “matter out of place” when consumed as food but a matter in place when alive and conforming to its location in the social and religious system of the Hindus. The cow is therefore unclean or clean depending on it status, dead or alive. In contrast, the pig is unclean in all forms; dead, alive, and symbol.

Two related studies in the literature that deserve to be mentioned here which were written in a similar period to Douglas’ writings, are the works of S. J. Tambiah (1969) and Ralph Bulmer (1967). Tambiah sets his story among the Thai where he takes up the problem of the relationship between dietary prohibitions and the animal classification scheme and the relation between the rules concerning the eating of animals and the rules pertaining to sex and marriage. Ralph Bulmer’s piece is among the Karam in the Schrader Mountains of New Guinea and he too looks at classifications of animals in which he examines the question of why the cassowary is not regarded as a bird.

While Thailand and New Guinea are set far apart geographically, have different histories and different flora and fauna, both these studies show a remarkable similarity in their conclusions. In each of the societies a concern with sexual relations, accepted or unaccepted, is projected onto Karam and Thai animal categories. In order to be a good son-in-law in Thailand, a man should know his place and observe correct relations; sex outside the accepted field is frowned upon and the reprobation is likened to that of a dog which represents dirt and promiscuity. Where the sexual deviance is even greater the man will be likened to an otter– which is a more pejorative comparison than being likened to a dog. The otter is classed as a wild animal but during flooding it leaves the wilds and paddles in the watery fields giving it an anomalous characteristic. Ideas about incest are carried from dog to otter and the son-in-law who has done wrong. For the Karam, the status of the cassowary is linked to the fundamental concerns of kinship and kinship rights, particularly as these are related to the problems of brother-sister relationships and those between cross-cousins, showing that the rules governing animal categories correspond to the rules governing human relations.

What both these studies demonstrate is the complexity involved in understanding animal taxonomy, and that they cannot be dispensed with through “simple explanations of such things as dietary

status in terms of taxonomy, or taxonomy in terms of dietary status" (Bulmer 1967:21). By showing the multitude of layers that are peeled away in the respective contexts, Bulmer and Tambiah reveal the complex relationship between dietary prohibitions and the animal classification schemes and how these then represent a strong analogy to food and sex, and inclusions and exclusions, among the Karam and Thai respectively.

Unlike Tambiah (1969) whose central concern is about, firstly, dietary prohibitions and the corresponding animal classification scheme, and secondly, the relation between the rules concerning the eating of animals and the rules pertaining to sex and marriage, my explorations are about Jews and Hindus and their dietary prohibitions and the role of these prohibitions in the formation of their identities. However, in the analysis of my interviews it became apparent that on the subject of marriage, the participants of both these groups said that they would prefer it if their children would marry "good Jewish" and "good Hindu" spouses. Following this, social intercourse between people within these groups is limited to people of similar philosophical tendencies, given that there are restrictions placed on what they eat, and this then places further restrictions on where and with whom they may eat. So one could conclude that there is a strong correlation between what the Jews and Hindus of this study eat and with whom they would like to consort.

R.S. Khare (1976) has written extensively on Hindu symbolic thought regarding food, and how this relates to the moral properties of food, social consequences, and most fundamentally, its cosmic meaning, which revolves around the hearth. In a North Indian Brahmin household context, Khare sets out the taxonomic complexity of these ideas, showing that classical Hindu thought underlies current practices dealing with all aspects of food, from its production to its distribution and its eventual consumption. Khare argues that Hindus regard food in all its forms as representing, in essence, the cosmos, and in particular, man's relations to the gods. In this regard, men and gods co-produce food: the gods by providing soil, rain and other essential elements, and men by applying themselves physically to the task of farming it, aided by their farming implements. Men share their produce with the gods to assure future co-operation, and eat what is left over – the *prasadam*. Extending from this relationship between men and gods are a host of ideas about kinds of food and the way food should be ranked according to its relationship to users, eaters, and cooks; appropriate foods for different occasions such as weddings and funerals; rules about giving and receiving food; and rules about food distribution, transactions, and exchanges. These rules pertaining to food show how powerful food is in certain contexts, and the social consequences it produces.

Similarly, Arjun Appadurai (1981) looks at food as part of the semiotic system in the context of a vegetarian Tamil Brahmin community of South India in the three areas of household, marriage feast, and temple. Appadurai is not concerned so much with the food cycle of this community which he argues is a variant of Khare's (1976) North Indian study, but with "rules and contexts" around which conflict is more likely to be made known (1981:497). Appadurai concludes that whenever food is exchanged in a domain, it carries reverberating meanings in other domains, as he demonstrates how food in the marriage feast has consequent implications for the household and temple.

Contemporary empirical literature

The studies in the literature shown above have, so far, contributed to theory and practice in which the dynamics of food, and the symbolic role of food as a key mode of communication, is understood. Recent work found in the literature on food and identity focuses on cultural contact, the difficult conundrum of change and stability, and the effect this has on the maintenance of boundaries, identities and dietary practices. The following studies, I believe, are important in showing how these changes affect dietary prohibitions and the meaning they have for communities and their social relationships: Aisha Khan (1994), Joelle Bahloul (1995), Andrew Buckser (1999) and Abbebe Kifleyesus (2002). The changing social worlds of Trinidad, France, Copenhagen, and Argobba, reflected in these works, are relevant for this study too, as I found parallel elements in my evidence gathered in Durban.

Andrew Buckser (1999) has explored an aspect of the subject of this thesis, namely kosher practice, which is the complex practice of the prescribed rituals of food and eating among Jews, in the setting of Copenhagen, Denmark. Buckser's article reports on the role of dietary habits among these Jews who have undergone great changes after the Second World War, and the effects modernity has in undermining the cohesive force of ethnic food within a well-defined and established community in Copenhagen. While the observance of dietary practices has shown a sharp decline, the social and political changes have not made these practices irrelevant. What has, in fact, happened, is that for many Jews the maintenance of dietary rules "in a community with amorphous boundaries and little consensus" (Buckser 1999:193) has become a way of keeping their relationship to Judaism apparent. So while the significance of maintaining kosher has changed over the last hundred years, "it has by no means evaporated" (ibid.). Buckser's Jews regard themselves as "fully Danish" and as such they do not have a special dress or live in separate neighbourhoods, nor do they have other traits that distinguish them from their non-Jewish neighbours. This observation is very similar to my own

discovery in Durban among the Jewish participants; there is no distinguishing feature in dress as such, and Jewish neighbourhoods are more and more reflecting the multiculturalism of that city. Like the Jews of Copenhagen, the Jews of Durban distinguish themselves not by their phenotypical features, nor through their previously set-apart enclaves, but through their observance of the prohibitions commanded by their religion.

Buckser examines kosher practice in three settings; non-Jewish social occasions; within the Jewish community; and within the Jewish household, and the bifurcation of behaviour attached to observance within these settings. For example, some Jews will eat a meal of pork with friends outside the house for the sake of maintaining social relationships and appearing to minimise differences between them, but will not bring pork into their own homes. The issues of mixed marriages and the problems of maintaining dietary rules are well argued by Buckser as to how they may lead to conflict between individuals in the home. What his examples point out is that while foods carry symbolic meanings, and while they are central for the construction of self in Jewish identity, they can often conflict with dominant identities. The way in which individuals and groups negotiate such identities is by using ethnic foods in ways that match their personal conceptions of self. And even with the challenges of modernity and even where ethnicity becomes more "uncertain and contested", Buckser (1999:206) concludes that "ethnic foods stand to become an increasingly important medium" through which Jews are able to maintain their identities.

Dietary laws have been taken up for study as representing the "most quotidian and obvious form of socio-cultural distinction" in the Jewish tradition, and like Buckser, Joelle Bahloul (1995:485) presents an ethnographic observation of these practices among North African or Maghrebian Jews who have established themselves in France since the 1960s. These immigrant Jews, shows Bahloul, while they strive to integrate with the dominant culture, still manage to retain aspects of their culture from Maghreb. Bahloul (1995:486) shows the "complex logic of otherness and distinction" at play in how meals are prepared and served and who eats. Sabbath lunches and their accompanying meals are contrasted with daily meals; the Sabbath lunch requires lots of ingredients and many hours of cooking, is thick and nutritionally satisfying, and eaten ritually with lots of people; the daily meal is light and "less compact than festive food" and is," like the social texture of daily life, with scattered relatives and a smaller number of eaters" (Bahloul 1995:492). The Sabbath stew, I learned from my Jewish participants in this study, is the most resonant, and redolent, manifestation of the laws of *kashrut*. What Bahloul has shown through the practices of these Jews is that the food of

ritual, contrasted with the food of daily life, registers with the sacred in time and space, and how this is established among these practitioners through the use of a calendar.

Bahloul's study takes a very in-depth look at many of the features presented to me by the participants of this study but alas, they were mentioned in passing in answer to questions I had asked about ritual and calendars and how these serve to reinforce group relations. What becomes obvious is that both groups in this study seem to ascribe a similar level of importance, regarding food and festival, to the quantitative and the qualitative; to the increase in the amount of food and its variety. Foods chosen for festival reflect celebration, aesthetics and the social, as opposed to ordinary foods eaten daily. The number of people eating at a festival increases and the food and drink chosen to be shared unites the participants in common commitment. What can be added to this is the distinctive clothing worn on such occasions. Such similarities were also found among the Oglala Sioux of the Pine Ridge reservation in south western South Dakota (Powers and Powers 1984:83) and in Tale society (M. Fortes 1936:598). Also, related to these ideas is Bahloul's interest in the institution of the pot as a "repository of identity", which would make an interesting future study among Jews and Hindus in Durban.

Religion and Taboo

In the literature, it is well attested that the word "taboo" comes from the Polynesian *tabu* (Franz Steiner: 1956; Émile Durkheim: 1915; Hutton Webster: 1942; Roy Wagner: 1987). More correctly, we are told, *tabu* is a Tongan word and the word *tapu* is found in Samoa, the Marquesas Island, the Society Islands, and New Zealand (Webster 1942:2). The word is made up of *ta*, to mark, and *pu*, an adverb denoting intensity, and when put together as a compound word it means "marked thoroughly" (Steiner 1956:31; Webster 1942:2).

That the word had entered the English world, and indeed English vocabulary, through the work of Captain James Cook, a British explorer who, in 1771 collected this conceptual artefact on his last voyage to the Pacific Ocean (Steiner 1956; Webster 1942), is also well attested. In his accounts of his transactions with the Tonga, Cook discovered, while entertaining a group of chiefs on board his ship, that when dinner was served no one would eat the meal that was provided. To the Captain's surprise they said that "they were all taboo" (Webster 1942:3) and Cook would subsequently learn

that the word had a wide usage among the various groups in the South Pacific, signifying that a thing is forbidden.

In his entry "Taboo" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Roy Wagner (1987:233) tells us that in Polynesian religion *tabu* served the function of separating or segregating people, objects, and the activities considered sacred or divine, from that which is polluting in the everyday sphere of life. From their quotidian practices he sites examples that include clothing and sleeping places of women in their menstrual cycles that would be dangerous to men. What he calls "eating *tapu*," required that men and women of unequal status ate separately using different utensils (ibid.). In contrast to *tapu*, *noa*, meaning whatever, or that which is free from being in a state of *tapu*, is the neutral or common state. But as Steiner (1956:36, 87) points out, *noa* is not the opposite of *tapu*, and it is, he says, the "unspecified, the unlimited, free and common" referring to that which is ordinary and routine.

Writing in 1854, Edward Shortland (quoted in Steiner 1956:32) informs us that the secondary usage of the word *tapu,* signifying sacred or prohibited things, has been used "because sacred things and places were commonly marked in a peculiar manner in order that everyone might know that they were sacred." However, the notion of taboo in the English language has extended its meaning and can refer to any word or topic likely to be controversial. This has led to a very loose and imprecise use of the word.

It is obvious, then, from the extended meaning of the word taboo that it cannot be understood simply as a technical concept for avoidances used in the contexts I am studying (such as animal prohibitions and their correlative observances), for it has a wide range of meanings that include symbols and values related to what the participants actually believe about the consequences of such beliefs. I, therefore, while acknowledging the roots of the word, and indeed employing the word taboo to refer to the institution of avoidances, try not to let its lexical semantics obscure the distinctive way the word is used in the data.

There appear to be two ways that taboo is treated in the literature: one which suggests that taboo is born of fear, and the other which suggests that religious symbols represent social values and play a role in maintaining correct relationships in society.

The subject of taboo and its theories relating to its origins have often been couched in the superstitious fears of "primitive man". Hutton Webster (1942:8-14) characterises this view when he

writes that: “Fears are systematised in taboo... [The fears of ‘primitive man] are often the product of a lively imagination and of an abysmal ignorance. They make anything potentially dangerous and so prompt him to avoidances, which, in their simplest forms, are almost as instinctive as those of the lower animals.” It is further suggested by Webster that taboos have been incorporated into a religious system but he distinguishes between the animistic prohibitions inserted by the early lawgiver classifying those as “elaborate codes of morality and religion” such as in the Laws of Manu (one of the standard books in the Hindu canon) and the Mosaic code, with those taboos held by the “primitive” people. What Webster seems to say is that the former is supported by “an appeal to divine authority” while the latter is associated with the “lowliest savage”. I wonder if Webster might have arrived at a different assumption if he had taken into account the cultural content of a specific society rather than assuming that ‘primitive man’ has a different view of taboo and its practice than those of later mentalities. For this will probably have answered his own query: “Who shall interpret the fancies, tricks, and childish guesses of the primitive mind?” (1942:9). But this was never going to happen as we learn from his conclusions that the taboo system among the ‘primitive people’ will eventually disintegrate when the society comes into contact with the outside “customs and beliefs of a superior civilization” (ibid.:374).

Such unkind and irreverent judgments as the ones made by Webster were not unusual in that formative period when anthropology and sociology were still attached to “pulpit and parish hall” where bishops and missionaries used its findings to censure religious texts (Douglas 1966:12). One of the main questions arising out of their enterprises was whether the savage was capable of advancement or not (ibid.). W. C. Willoughby, (1932:264) a missionary, writing about taboos among the Bantu concludes:

> Taboos are...only symptoms of disorder, and it is sheer quackery...two thousand years have passed since Jesus shocked Jew and Gentile by setting religion free from taboo and rite...but still thousands of our own folk cling to rites, and shrink from making thirteen at table or marrying in the month of May, while not a few think it more heinous to rob a church than to filch from a widow...Africans who do foolish things in their terror of taboo should be classed, not with evil-doers, but with children who have been threatened with bugaboos till they shriek at shadows.

Willoughby, in his argument, raises a few issues: the Christian polemic against the Jewish religion and the view that Christians have of other religions and the general self-ascribed superiority of the

West over the non-Western world. The theological attacks and polemics against the Jews began with Paul in the New Testament, who, in Romans 9:30-11:32 criticises Jews for their failure to accept Jesus as messiah and for calling themselves the chosen people. Christianity is seen as the highest good and as an extension of civilization having the right answer for the world. Thus Christianity, for Willoughby, is the denouement of all religious development and its task is to control the infantile 'primitive' Africans. It is this attitude of what I regard as religious chauvinism that continues to exist today among Christians and other religions, and as becomes evident in my data, particularly towards the two groups of this study. Both Jews and Hindus do not have a missionary mandate, that is, to go out and convert people to their own faiths. Hindus, though, have a natural tendency to acknowledge the existence of the divine foundations of all the religions of the world and as such a few of the participants did not have a problem about entering a church or mosque. However, their relations to Christians have been strained in the fifteen or more decades they have lived in Durban; Christianity was the religion of the coloniser and hence the dominant religion. Hindus who participated in this study have reacted negatively to large numbers of Hindu conversions to Christianity. Many participants argue that Christianity has displaced their religion because they have had, and still have, large coffers, and many privileges, being the dominant religion on the side of the then prevailing status quo, and to a large extent they have altered the customs and habits of the people who have converted. It has, therefore, made any form of dialogue and ecumenism between the two groups difficult but that is not to say that it doesn't exist in some quarters.

But the problem of how Christianity views other religions is also related to the problem of how the evolutionary thinkers theorised about religion. In *Primitive Culture* (1871), Edward Burnett Tylor, who was partly influenced by Darwin's biological evolution and his idea of the survival of the fittest, developed an evolutionary progressive theory of religion arguing that as man progressed from the "savage" to the "barbaric" and finally to the "civilised stage", animism evolved into polydemonism, polytheism, and eventually into monotheism – which he regarded as the highest stage of animism – as found in the ethical monotheisms of Judaism and Christianity. He produced what he called a "rudimentary" definition of religion, "belief in spiritual beings" which he believed to be the essence of religion (Tylor, Vol 1, 1871:424). However, in the data that Tylor amassed on the different 'primitive' cultures, he developed a theory of survivals that suggests that the simplest forms of religious life as they survived among the "lower races" were in principle those found in the beginning of time (ibid.:16). Elements of the earliest forms of religion have carried through and perhaps adapted to their new context but nevertheless contain evidence of those early influences. It

is this idea of survivals offered by Tylor that enables us to account for the persistence of taboos in religion and its continuity in contemporary culture.

James Frazer, another evolutionary thinker following Tylor, developed an interest in taboos after he discovered that the evidence he accumulated for the subject of taboo was too great to ignore. In his "Taboo" volume in *The Golden Bough* (1914): *Taboo And The Perils Of The Soul*, Frazer organises taboos under four sections: tabooed acts, persons, things, and words. Under tabooed acts he puts taboos on intercourse with strangers, on eating and drinking, on the revealing of the face, on leaving the house, and on leftover food. Under the heading of tabooed persons he includes chiefs and kings, mourners, menstruating women, and childbirth, warriors, manslayers and hunters and fishermen. His list of tabooed things contain iron, sharp weapons, blood, head, hair, hair-cutting ceremonies and the disposal of the hair, spittle, certain foods, knots and rings. In the last category he includes personal names, names of relations, the names of the dead, kings and other sacred personages, the names of gods, and certain common words.

For Frazer these things were imbued with danger and therefore had to be isolated because, he argued, the 'savage' mind was incapable of linking it to the social context. Or, was it Frazer who was incapable of linking it to the social context? Frazer was unable to see that there was a pattern to all these taboos he so industriously listed – it was simply regarded as dangerous. What Frazer attempts to show in the tomes of lists produced in *Taboo And The Perils Of The Soul* is that taboos are irrational and absurd forms of behaviour, and this is demonstrated by the incoherent and uncritical way these lists are compiled and ordered. Bringing his argument back to religion, Frazer (1914:224) argues that "taboos of holiness agree with taboos of pollution because the savage does not distinguish between holiness and pollution". But Frazer thinks that the "primitives" have confused holiness and un-cleanliness, as he says in *Spirits Of The Corn And Of The Wild* (Part V, Vol. 11, 1914:23), in his consideration of the Syrian attitude to pigs:

> Some said it was because pigs were unclean; others said it was because pigs were sacred. This...points to a hazy state of religious thought in which the idea[s] of sanctity and uncleanness are not yet sharply distinguished, both being blent in a sort of vaporous solution to which we give the name taboo.

This same example was mentioned in 1889 by a theologian and a scholar of Semitic religions, William Robertson Smith, in a series of Burnett lectures, presented between1890 and 1891, in which

the subject of taboo was discussed relating them to rules of holiness ([1889] 1956:153). Robertson Smith, however, goes beyond simply categorising taboos and gets to the practical matters of such enactments by clearing for us the "hazy state of religious thought" that has left Frazer confused. Taboo then was defined as "a system of restrictions on man's arbitrary use of natural things, enforced by the dread of supernatural penalties" (Robertson Smith [1889] 1956:152). And here he talks of civil penalties also. For, he says, "in virtue of its solidarity the whole community is compromised by the impiety of any of its members, and is concerned to purge away the offence" (ibid.). The element of fear, which inspires these taboos, often took the form of rules regarding uncleanness and this, he says, is no different in the Semitic field. The examples he provides include women after childbirth, or when men have touched the corpse of the dead, and they then, who are in a changed status, are temporarily separated from society.

But Robertson Smith, who has named the institution of taboo following the Polynesian word, goes beyond theological explanations of this concept and takes an empirical approach to his subject by explaining the term in relation to human beings; a theologian who works from below as opposed to seeing everything only from the point of view of god above, setting the sacred realm in relation to human intercourse ([1894] 1956:446):

> Holy and unclean things have this in common, that in both cases certain restrictions lie on men's use of and contact with them, and that the breach of these restrictions involves supernatural dangers. The difference between the two appears, not in their relation to man's ordinary life, but in their relation to the gods. Holy things are not free to man, because they pertain to the gods; uncleanness is shunned, according to the view taken in the higher Semitic religions, because it is hateful to the god, and therefore not to be tolerated in his sanctuary, his worshippers, or his land.

This statement made by Smith suggests that the sacred is associated with restrictions and the relation of man to these restrictions. There are things and actions that man may not do for fear of the gods. On the other hand, 'primitive man' honours similar restrictions even if the need arises purely from instinct. The rules of uncleanness, he says, which are determined by the gods, "appear altogether arbitrary and meaningless" ([1894] 1956:447). However, there is no difference between what the primitive people did and what the sophisticated Semites do; the difference lies in what motivates them to keep the restrictions.

It is worth noting, in light of the above discussion, that Robertson Smith saw every religion having on the one hand "certain beliefs", and on the other "certain institutions ritual practices and rules of conduct" ([1894] 1956:16-17) He argued that the modern habit was to look at religion from the side of belief systems rather than of practice which could be less dogmatic. Furthermore, he says that no positive religion, alluding to those religions which can trace their origins to an innovative leader, for example, Judaism or Buddhism, began "*tabula rasa"* and expressed itself "as if religion were beginning for the first time; in form, if not in substance, the new system must be in contact all along the line with the older ideas and practices which it finds in possession" (ibid.:1-2). His thinking is encapsulated in this quote: "Religion is not an arbitrary relation of the individual man to a supernatural power, it is a relation of all the members of a community to a power that has the good of the community at heart, and protects its law and moral order" (ibid.:55).

Unlike the vicissitudes of social fashion, religion appears to have an unbroken succession of belief and practice that has existed since its beginnings. For the practitioners of Hinduism and Judaism in this study, there is also an historical continuity with the traditions they believe and practice now, and everything in their respective religions is as if it were always there, without change as if it were not, to put it in Robertson Smith's words, "under the unconscious forces operating from age to age" (ibid.). In more contemporary studies, Steven Vertovec and Peter van der Veer(1991:153) in their work on Caribbean Hinduism have made the point that "religious identities depend on ideologies which tend to deny change and history". This is bolstered by the idea inherent in its belief and practice that Hinduism is "eternal and unchanging" (ibid.). Furthermore, the established traditions of these Hindu and Jewish communities seem to have a life of their own and neither their antiquity nor authenticity can be, either way, proved or disproved (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

In summary, the Christian source of prejudice in its treatment of taboo is clear and its parochialism is evident. However, there has been some progress made since the evolutionary thinkers (Tylor and Frazer) theorised that religion would disappear and that science will triumph or that primitive religion will culminate in a one-god-theism; the institution of taboo has been lifted from descriptive lists and presented as a reality that exists and persists among observing communities, thus making the supposed irrationality of taboos rational. A line of thinking has also been opened by Robertson Smith drawing attention to notions of holy and the sacred, pure and impure, thus introducing new ways of viewing the subject of avoidances. His idea, that the primitive gods are an essential part of the community and their values, is taken up by Émile Durkheim and the successive school of thinkers following him. So, far from Willoughby's taboos being "symptoms of disorder," what follows in the

literature shows how taboo functions within society to order social relationships and create social sentiments, thereby giving meaning to the community. But first, it is important to point out the theoretical significance of classification, and the cultural expression of categories in the delicate and intricate relationship between nature and social relations, thus enabling one to discern order in the social system and make sense of it.

Primitive Classification is a prelude to Durkheim's more famous work, *The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life.* This book contains an overall perspective of religion consisting of institutions and practices related to social integration, contrasting it with magic as a derivative of religion. Durkheim considered the clan cult of totemism, and its social functions, to be the most elementary form of religion. About the question of the origins of religion, Durkheim (1915:8) had this to say: "If we understand this to be the very beginning, the question has nothing scientific about it and should be resolutely discarded. There is no given moment when religion began to exist, and there is consequently no need in finding a means of transporting ourselves thither in thought". Durkheim, therefore, "discredits" such ideas on origins as "speculation" and dismisses them as "subjective and arbitrary constructions which are subject to no sort of control" (ibid.).

Rather than going in pursuit of origins, Durkheim (1915:7) wanted "to find a means of discerning the ever-present causes on which the most essential forms of religious thought and practice depend". His material is taken from studies of Australian Aborigines in the 1890s – a society, he believed, where the simplest and basic constituents of religion were most visible and present – to support his theory of religion. These societies, he argued, were "less complicated" and observing them allowed one to get close to the origin of religion, by which he meant not the absolute beginning but the "most simple social condition that is actually known or that beyond which we cannot go at present" (ibid:8).

Before I get ahead of myself here I need to delve briefly into the literature on the question of what religion is before proceeding with the discussion. One of the most basic issues in the study of the sociology of religion is the question of what religion is and whether it can be defined. On what grounds can Hinduism and Judaism, which I have been referring to all along as religions, be considered religions? I am not going to present all the definitions found in the literature but the ones I have chosen are predicated on the theoretical developments which they exemplify.

On the definition of religion

In the literature, there appears to be two groups of scholars; those who define religion and those who don't. Those who do, either say what religion does (that is by its social and psychological functions), or, what religion is (by its belief content). And still a few have combined these conceptions in their definitions to say what religion is and then go on to say what religion does, that is, the consequences of religion(Durkheim 1915). Within this group of definers, there are those whose definitions are too broad (Geertz 1971) and those whose definitions are too narrow (Tylor 1871). Then there are those who assume a definition at the beginning of their enquiry (Tylor 1871; Durkheim 1915) and those who warn against defining religion before carefully studying it (Weber 1922). In the literature, those who don't define and condemn the defining of religion use neither of these approaches mentioned above but propose alternative ways of examining this phenomenon called religion (Woodhead 2011; Momen 1999; Irena Borowik 2011). Whatever their proclivities in defining the concept, scholars agree, at least broadly, that religion eludes consensus, question its adequacy, and emphasize the need for boundaries as to what constitutes religion and what does not – for some at least.

But for some it is not so much the problem of defining as it is the problem of defining explicitly. In *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia,* Geertz (1971:1) has noted that "the comparative study of religion has always been plagued by this peculiar embarrassment: the elusiveness of its subject matter," which he attributes not to a poorly defined category but, rather, to the lack of sufficient empiricism: "The problem is not one of constructing definitions of religion. We have had quite enough of those; their very number is a symptom of our malaise. It is a matter of discovering just what sorts of beliefs and practices support what sorts of faith under what sorts of conditions. Our problem, and it grows worse by the day, is not to define religion but to find it".

Recognising that in producing a definition of religion, one cannot simply follow the natural impulse to describe religion as a belief in god, which is what he believed that his Christian readers in his particular context may have wanted to hear, Tylor (1871) considers another approach to include the beliefs and gods of people who fall outside the mainly Judeo-Christian religious paradigm. He produced what he called a "rudimentary" definition. Religion, for Tylor (1871 v1:424), is a "belief in spiritual beings". He discovered that the essence of religion was animism. By cataloguing dozens of examples from the earlier centuries of human civilisation – for example, if one asks why gods have human personalities (1871 v2:247), or why gifts are given to the dead, (1871 v1: 459-466) – Tylor

shows how the doctrine of animism makes sense of ideas and behaviours that would otherwise appear to us as nothing more than irrational and incomprehensible.

For Frazer (1922:58) religion is made up of two elements: "...a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them." However, his three step evolutionary argument that humanity's mental stage is characterised by magic (in which one commands the gods), followed by religion (in which one beseeches the gods), culminating in science (a phase in which one understands the errors of the preceding phases) does not reveal a very positive view of religion. In fact, what is suggested here is that religion changes not because needs change but because science provides a more persuasive means of satisfying needs. Or does it? What later thinkers show is a more sympathetic attitude toward religion in the way they treated the subject with the care and sensitivity it demanded. The purely intellectual approach to religion, focussing only on beliefs analysed by scholars who had no real access to the people they studied except through the facts collected by missionaries and travellers, gave way to studies that would be conducted in the social world in which "real" people are observed and definitions are developed accordingly.

Following Roberstson Smith, Durkheim developed a thesis that all peoples recognised a radical distinction of the universe into sacred and profane categories. He made several claims before producing his definition of religion: we must first know what religion is, he said, of what elements it is made up, from what causes it results and what functions it fulfils before we go in search of the elementary religion. According to Durkheim (1915:47):

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

By Durkheim's (1915:299-300) definition of religion, sacred beings are separated from profane beings. Ritual actions effect this separation and since their function is to prevent these two states from "undue mixing" they can only do this by imposing "abstentions or negative acts" rather than positive acts. Therefore certain ways are forbidden in the form of prohibitions or taboos.

This total opposition between the sacred and the profane and the requisite interdictions or taboos for the observant is Durkheim's formula for social integration. Rules of separation are the

characteristic traits of the sacred and all that is religious, which stands in contradistinction to the profane.

However, while Durkheim emphasised the social aspects of community integration, it was Hans Mol (1976) who first developed the concept of religion as a matter of identity. Mol emphasised the individual's need for identity which he believed was satisfied by religion, and isolated the specific contribution of religion to integration by suggesting that it sacralises identity by means of the following mechanisms: an ideal order is projected onto an abstract realm to protect it from the complexities and dislocations of the real world; an emotional attachment is built around identities; highly routinised activities are maintained to prevent the sacred from being trivialised; and the re-enactment of myth ensures the preservation of religion (ibid.).

Other ways of understanding religion developed in the 1960s with a conception of culture taking prominence over belief and practices, and is evident in the approaches to religion which interpret religion as an all-embracing system of meaning which covers the whole of life. Two scholars exemplify this approach, namely, Peter Berger (1967) and Clifford Geertz (1973). Berger argued in *The Sacred Canopy* (1967) that there was little point arguing over definitions. He said that they were *ad hoc* constructs and he noted that his basic attitude toward them was one of a "relaxed ecumenical tolerance". For Berger, religion provides a system of meaning for making sense of the world, and for covering contingency with a canopy of sacrality and taken-for-grantedness. He suggests that human beings need to be able to impose a cognitive order upon the chaotic disorderliness of reality to enable them to function. Thus, for Berger, it is the cultural order that makes social life possible and society makes the cultural order possible. In 1974, Berger revised his view and showed a changed position where he is militantly opposed to functional definitions, choosing substantive ones instead. In this thesis the use of a functional definition combined with the substantive definition means that the plausibility of the Hindu and Jewish worldviews is maintained for the observant members of these respective religions at any rate.

Geertz goes further than Berger by developing a more complex account of culture. The emphasis for Geertz is also on the emotional as well the intellectual approach to culture. Geertz steered away from functionalism in his work and explained religion as people themselves practised it, abandoning explanations of behaviour in favour of "interpretation of cultures" and the production of meaning.

In "*The Interpretation of Cultures"* (1973), Geertz begins with the chapter, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in which he points out that although the term "culture" has meant different things to scholars in anthropology, the core attribute of the word is the idea of "meaning" or "significance". Culture denotes, therefore, "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes toward life" (ibid.:89). He quotes Max Weber saying that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (1973:5). Geertz (ibid.) takes "culture to be those webs" and interpretation to be the method of cultural analysis which is not, he says, "an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretive one in search of meaning". In order to explain the cultures of human beings anthropologists must engage in a method described by the English philosopher, Gilbert Ryle, as "thick description". Not only should one describe what happens but one should say what people intend by what happens. When one takes into account the element of meaning, the significance of the physical motion, then interpreting action can be quite different. So, it is not enough, he argues, to simply describe the structure of the tribe or clan, the bare elements of ritual, or to say that Muslims fast in the month of Ramadan. The task is to discover meanings and intentions behind what people do, and the significance of all of life and thought in their rituals, structures, and beliefs. Geertz, despite his claims elsewhere (1971:96-97) that he will eschew (explicit) definitions of religion, later proceeds to offer one. According to him (1973:90) religion is:

> a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic

Geertz (ibid.:125) advocates that the anthropological study of religion has two stages which are put into operation: "first an analysis of the system of meanings embodied in the symbols which make up the religion proper, and second, the relating of these systems to social-structural and psychological processes," which is encapsulated in his definition. What Geertz concludes after a lengthy treatise on his definition is that the second stage of the definition relating to the social-structural and psychological processes is generally drawn into the analysis and is present in much contemporary work, which is not displeasing to him. However, it is the neglect of the "system of symbols" in the analysis of religion he bemoans, which is very important to Geertz (ibid.:98) because it is this that "induces human beings to formulate...general ideas of order". A theoretical neglect of this aspect, he

argues, does not produce effective analysis for social and psychological aspects in religion. While I draw on Geertz's conception of religion as culture, and incorporate his theory of "symbolic action" in my analysis, and certainly try to employ his method of "thick description", I find his definitional net of religion too wide to be able to catch all manner of phenomena that could be taken as religious.

No doubt I take his point that functionalism (the sociological sort associated with Radcliffe-Brown or the social-psychological sort assorted with Malinowski, originating in the work of Durkheim and Robertson Smith before him) has emphasised the manner in which beliefs and practices reinforce and strengthen traditional social ties in a group. On the other hand, Frazer and Tylor have emphasised what religion does for the individual, making the world comprehensible through an intellectual understanding of religion. The two approaches have been combined have increased our understanding of the social and psychological functions of religion. What is least impressive about this approach, for Geertz, is that it does not account for social change and he attributes its weakness to "its failure to treat sociological and cultural processes on equal terms" (Geertz 1973:142-169).

To make this claim more worthy, Geertz illustrates the failure of the functionalist approach by applying it to a particular case he experienced in his fieldwork. The setting is in a small town in eastern central Java in a place called Modjokuto where a ten year old boy died while in the custody of his uncle. In Javanese custom the interment is usually "hurried, subdued, yet methodically efficient" following the usual routine of how it is always done. However, this particular burial routine – because the boy was not with his parents when he died, so that his identity was brought into question – was extended to the point of bringing psychological strain and tension to the community. The practice of beliefs and rituals that was followed for countless generations "suddenly failed to work with its accustomed effectiveness" and to understand its failure demands knowledge and understanding of the social and cultural changes that had taken place in Java (ibid.:146), and the context in which the boy died, where questions about the uncle's religious values undermined the boy's right to a customary religious burial. The disruption in the little boy's funeral points to "an incongruity between the cultural framework of meaning and the patterning of social interaction, an incongruity" says Geertz, "due to the persistence in an urban environment of a religious symbol system adjusted to peasant social structure" (ibid.:169). Static functionalism, continues Geertz, "is unable to isolate this kind of incongruity" (ibid.).

It is clear in the example of the Modjokuto boy that identity "does not proceed in a straight, unbroken line, from some fixed origin", as Stuart Hall (1989:222-6) says, and should not be thought

of “as an already accomplished fact”. Identity should be thought of in terms of “‘production’, which is never complete, always in process”. Hall (1989:225) says of cultural identity:

> It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.

While I use the approach which Geertz refers to as a “...primitive...conceptual apparatus”, referring to the functionalist approach, I do take his criticisms and note the limitations he has identified. However, I find Durkheim’s definition of religion useful in that it has a certain portability and transposability as an analytical tool because it fits adequately with the problem of this thesis; howsoever advanced the two groups in Durban in this century may be, their attitude to ritual, their division of things into sacred and profane categories, and the persistence of interdictions, makes them no different from the very “simple” system that Durkheim has described. And, too, the principal significance of religion arises from its role as a social device for expressing and reinforcing the values most essential to social integration. But that is not to say that change was not perceived in the two groups I have observed. In fact, the problems of intermarriage and conversion have revealed some of the difficulties that the Hindus and Jews are experiencing in Durban in maintaining dietary practices and keeping boundaries tight. So these things considered, I keep Durkheim’s definition but adjust it to incorporate change and meaning.

Is Hinduism a religion?

Romilla Tharpar (1989:224) has argued that the idea of Hinduism as a religion and as a term of ascription applied to a practicing community was employed since at least the fifteenth century in India; initially its usage was as a concession to being regarded as ‘the other’ by Muslims. However, for T.N. Madan (2003:289), the idea of Hindu as a homogenous term emerged only in the nineteenth century in response to western colonial and Christian missionary challenges and as a result of modern infrastructure that improved travel and communication. While this had the effect of bringing together a multitude of communities differing in language, religion, caste, and ascribed occupations into a “shared identity of Hindus”, it did not, he argues, have the effect of merging these diverse groups into one (ibid.:290). However, this kind of bringing together under an umbrella

term of such diverse groups of people was politically significant, and in a positive light it created an awareness of some shared values, such as the common textual tradition (ibid.).

Nevertheless, like John Hinnells (2005:5-6), one may ask if the single English word "Hinduism", is appropriate to describe the phenomenon I am studying. Any student approaching Hinduism, it would appear, is faced with the obstacles of defining Hinduism. However the term was first used, it is important to note that the word "Hindu" did not start off as a term denoting the specific religious practices pertaining to some transcendent realm or Supreme Being. For its beginnings cannot be ascribed to a discernible human founder like there is in Buddhism, Christianity or Judaism. The term Hindu referred to a "*cultural* expression" and the "ways of life of a culturally unified and geographically designated people" (Lipner 2006:94). It has no universal creed. Its scriptures are of immense size and of a bewildering diversity. And yet in Durban they call themselves Hindus, suggesting a single religious tradition and not a loose confederation of many different pieties and devotional styles.

In the 1970s and 1980s sociologists wrote from an entirely secular perspective about other religious groups in the West. The religions of migrants and diaspora groups were simply labelled as either Hindu, Muslim, and so on, but there was rarely any discussion of patterns of religious change and continuity, and nothing about how these religions have been shaped in the diaspora. Hinnells (2005:11) has suggested two reasons for this kind of attitude toward other religions: firstly, scholars undertaking these studies were not themselves religious, and so they tended to look past the religion of the subjects they were writing about. Secondly, it was assumed that the religions of the migrants would fade over the years and there would be assimilation into the dominant or host religion. It was also assumed that the migrants had left their religion in their home country. Although a large number of Hindus, according to the participants in this study, in Durban did convert to Christianity in the early period of their indenture to secure employment and land, this did not have the effect of increasing their social acceptance and thus made their assimilation only partial. However, a large number of the indentured labourers retained their Hindu beliefs and practices.

Indeed the problem pointed out by Hinnells appears to be a problem taken up by different scholars who "often apply the concept 'religion' in non-western contexts without clarifying and sufficiently separating the different meanings subsumed under this concept" (King 1989:75). Ursula King points out that 'religion' is used as an "observer's construct" and "it is applied to sets of activities which the actors themselves may not necessarily term religious, nor may they necessarily combine distinctly

separate activities into a coherent unity in the way the observer does" (ibid.). The difficulty presented by King is very apparent among Durban Hindus; by calling their religion Hinduism it gives "the impression of an overall unity and coherence which the religious tradition has never possessed. The various historical strands which went into the making of Hinduism include a great diversity of beliefs, rituals, and institutions which, strictly speaking, are often not comparable to those found elsewhere" (ibid.). What King has noted is that indologists usually reconstruct a forgotten past removed from contemporary society while sociologists and anthropologists are often too closely focussed on the immediacy of the present, paying attention to Indian social structure, caste, kinship and village studies. Neither group of scholars, she argues, pays attention to the complexity of the past-present continuum in Hinduism (ibid.:72).

In Durban, a neo-Hinduism has emerged and developed since the early twentieth century and as King has said, many aspects of the religion "would not exist in its present form were it not for the prolonged contact between the different societies and cultures of India and the West. The beginnings of this culture contact go back as far as the late fifteenth century or even earlier, but the interaction between the different cultures was intensified during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially through the full development of colonialism. The emergence of neo-Hinduism is closely linked to important political, economic, social and cultural changes brought about during the last 150 years." (ibid.:73). These comments by King are appropriate to my own study and fit the data very well for it is now just over 150 years that Indians began arriving in Durban as indentured workers under the Assisted Emigration scheme instituted by Britain.

Is Judaism a religion?

Judaism is a term derived from the Hebrew word *Yehudah,* and is regarded by the Jewish people in Durban as a way of life and the expression of the covenantal relationship established between god and his people through obedience to his commandments. Any endeavour to define a religion suggests that there should be an "essence" or set of qualities that distinguish it from other parts of life; hence a distinction is made between the transcendent realm and everything else (King 1987:282). If one were to determine such a distinction in Judaism, then one could argue that Judaism is a monotheistic religion with one foundational text, the Torah; and that its separateness has been institutionalised in a number of ways through rites, sacred books, holy days, the synagogue, and beliefs and practices that show the relationship of the Jews with the transcendent. However, while these are the obvious distinguishing features, they are not disconnected from the

total cultural matrix of Jewish life and behaviour; their beliefs and practices, customs, and rituals, personified through the daily observance of *kashrut* and the weekly maintenance of Sabbath, can only be understood in reference to this larger matrix.

Furthermore, following Durkheims' (1915:47) definition of religion, Judaism qualifies as a religion, having the requisite "beliefs and practices" relative to the sacred, including being set apart through the prohibition of the pig, resulting in group cohesiveness. However, Judaism goes beyond these more obvious features of a religion because it includes, as part of its definition of itself, the idea of a common history and ancestry. This idea was expressed by several of my participants, aptly captured by one of them who said:

> We regard ourselves as a single people with a single history whether it's from Yemen or Iraq or Lithuania, you are all part of a single history.[i]

It means, therefore, that although by definition one may say that Judaism constitutes a religion, it is also inextricably linked to a universal community of Jews and genealogy. The question of who is a Jew in Durban was often answered by the participants who said that anyone who is born of a Jewish mother is a Jew. However, the diminishing numbers of Jews in Durban, and the inability to sustain endogamous marriages, has led to inter-marriages. Although conversions take place in order to obey the commandments and ensure the continuity of the community, boundaries are blurred, which affects group identity and cohesiveness, denaturalises the mother as the source of Jewish identity, and questions definitions of Jewish religion.

Therefore, following Unterman (1981:8), I am loath to "impose procrustean categories" on the religion of the Jews, and achieve this by studying it in its particular context; the separation of time and the ordering of space as the daily embodiment of their beliefs and practices through the personal and the communal, and their acute awareness of their unique history and culture, point to the religious identity of the Jews in Durban.

Diaspora and identity

The etymology of the word diaspora is made up from a Greek composite verb meaning the scattering or dispersion of seed. When used with an initial capital, it referred to the scattering of the Jews among the gentiles after the Babylonian exile in 586 BC. Although initially used to refer to Jews

living elsewhere than in Israel, and the places where they live, the word has also come to mean a mass migration movement or flight from one place – a point or place from which the dispersion occurs – to many other places; it is also a name given to a group so dispersed. The term has been applied to languages as well as to people (McArthur 1992:303).

In the literature there are some who argue that most conceptualisations of the term diaspora have been formulated around the features of the Jewish dispersal as a prototype or framework for the understanding of other diasporas (Safran 1991, Cohen1997). The problem is that the Jewish diaspora is so inextricably entwined in its theological and soteriological meanings that one might ask how it is possible to apply such a conceptual understanding of the term to a religion other than a Jewish or Christian one (Baumann 1995:20-21). For Safran (1991:36-37), whose ideas are based on the Jewish diaspora as a paradigm, the following characteristics apply: dispersal happens from the original "centre"; there is a retention of collective memory, vision, and myth about the location and history of the homeland, which is often associated with suffering; there are difficulties of adjustment and settlement; there is a myth of return; contact is maintained with the homeland "either personally or vicariously"; and religious and cultural identities are preserved in the host country.

This framework has many useful elements for understanding and conceptualising diaspora. However, Safran's insistence on examining all diasporas through the prototype of the Jewish experience limits the understanding of diaspora to a particular kind of dispersion associated with a particular group with specific historical meaning – that of "exile under conditions of minority status and of powerlessness" (Safran 1991:38). For example, there is among some of the Jewish participants of this study an ambivalence about the physical return to the land which has characterised much of their consciousness in diaspora, which has been passed on to them from their ancestors, since not all Durban Jews want to return to Israel.

Safran's definition of diaspora does not include such a feature, though he insists that the Jewish diaspora be used as a template for understanding "classic" diaspora as opposed to "generic" diaspora (Safran 2005:38). Similarly, Barbara Kirschenblatt Gimblett (1994:340) argues that in discussing matters of displacement, statelessness and homelessness, "the Jew has served as the oncomouse of social theory".

How then is one to understand the concept of diaspora as a Hindu experience, seeing that it "is an evocation of a diaspora with a particular resonance within European cartographies of displacement

... and is emblematically situated within Western iconography as the diaspora *par excellence*" (Avtar 1996:181)? James Clifford (1994:306) argues that Jews should not be thought of as a normative model when understanding the origins and connotations of the term diaspora.

Robin Cohen, similarly, has shown (1997:1-29) that while the Jewish tradition is at the core of any definition of the concept of diaspora, and while it is necessary to take account of this tradition, it is also necessary to go beyond it. His reasons are that the Jewish traditions are much more complex than many assume, that not all Jewish communities outside the natal home were forcibly exiled, and furthermore, that the word diaspora is now being used in interesting and suggestive contexts denoting a vast array of different peoples. So while Cohen draws on the classic formulation of the Jewish diaspora, he also goes beyond this conception by including alternate kinds of social relationships and links of the diaspora to homeland as history and geography (Cohen 1997:26).

The theoretical and descriptive work offered by Cohen (1997) expands the concept of diaspora to include the voluntary movement of people, either seeking work abroad as part of trade and commercial networks, or as part of colonial settlement. These types of diaspora consciously maintain ethnic or religious institutions, and group identity, bolstered by notions of common origin, common experience and links to an ancestral homeland. His approach makes room for all forms of diaspora, which will then include the Hindu diaspora.

Certainly, there has been a call for a more widely extended application of the concept diaspora that would go beyond its "Jewish-centered" definition. As Khachig Tölölian (1991) writes in the editorial preface of the first issue of *Diaspora*, "Diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment." However, he adds that the term diaspora will not be privileged in the new "*Journal of Transnational Studies*" for "the term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community" (Tölölian 1991:4-5; Vertovec 1999:1). In fact, as Safran (2005:51) points out, the term diaspora has been extended so widely that "to be in diaspora, one does not necessarily have to have moved from one country to another or be a descendant of an immigrant. What is important is that one – or one's narrative – falls outside the 'hegemonic norm' of one's society in terms of race, religion, ideology, cultural interests, sexual preferences, or lifestyle".

In his study on Caribbean identities, in a section on the cross-currents of diaspora, Stuart Hall (1995:3) discusses the complexities of identities which, he argues, do not "remain fixed". These cultures, he argues, are "almost never self-contained. They became subject at once to complex processes of assimilation, translation, adaptation, resistance, reselection and so on. That is to say, they became in a deep sense diasporic societies".

Continuing this line of reasoning, N. Jayaram (2004:16) notes that migration associated with diaspora does not mean the mere physical movement of people. Jayaram (ibid.) explains that migrants carry with them a socio-cultural baggage which consists of: a predefined social identity; a set of religious beliefs and practices; and a framework of norms and values governing family, kinship, food habits and language. Migrants, says Jayaram (ibid.), are not completely cut off from their land of origin, which is characterised by the "myth of the return".

In the following chapter I explore the processes surrounding the reproduction and reconstruction of diaspora communities as they have emerged among those who identify themselves as Hindus and Jews in Durban.

Endnotes

[i] Rosenthal, Caleb. 22nd October 2010. Interview at his home in La Lucia: Durban.

Chapter 3

Background to the study

Introduction

In the first part of this chapter I argue that there is no single Hindu tradition ever present among the diaspora of Hindus in Durban. What I show is how their beliefs and practices are reproduced within their new surroundings, and how they recreate their religion in Durban. I look at the historical circumstances that prompted migration from India and settlement in Durban, and at the political and social background of those Hindus who settled in Durban after serving their contracts of indentureship. I look at the early history of Hinduism in Durban, and the various influences that affected the ways they practised their Hinduism.

The particular taboo applied to the cow by Hindus cannot be viewed in discrete terms because it fits into a larger system of beliefs and practices, resulting in everyday practices and prescriptions that complement such a proscription. These prescriptions take the form of a complex cultic life made up of the honouring of deities, life-cycle rituals, rituals for ancestors, pilgrimage, calendars, and festivals. I single out the Hare Krishna group as an example of how purity and pollution laws are manifested in personal and public cultic practices.

In order to understand a number of persistent practices in Hinduism, it is necessary to consider the question of caste. I give a brief history of the formation of caste in India, and while considering its failure to transplant itself to Durban, note that a number of its institutions have influenced existing Hindu practices, particularly in the realm of food. The chapter considers the early culinary habits of the Hindus in Durban, and the subsequent role of a number of neo-Hindu movements in creating a degree of homogeneity among Hindus and also in creating and maintaining the prohibition on the eating of the cow. To understand the various practices associated with the prohibition of the cow, and the concepts of purity and pollution that persist in Hindu practices, I briefly outline the purity and pollution laws around food, marriage and commensality as they appear in the caste system in order to understand how remnants of that system underpin current Hindu practices.

I begin by showing that the Hindus who settled in Durban were a diverse group with no central form of worship that existed around a temple of a communal nature; nor did they have any form of social

or political organisation. I argue that it was the neo-Hindu movements which played a significant role in homogenising the group through its leadership and organisational elements.

The wide range of geographical and social origins of the Indians who came to Durban to work on the sugar estates, and following them those who came to set up commercial enterprises, meant that the religious backgrounds of the diaspora population comprised a hotchpotch of beliefs and practices, and experiences and orientations, regarding matters of faith.

The second part of this chapter outlines the background of the Jews who arrived in Durban and how they established themselves there. Unlike the Hindus, they were more homogenous in their beliefs and practices, and the factors affecting their settlement in Durban took a different form. I show how the three categories – of dietary laws, community membership and marriage, and the weekly observance of Sabbath – are some of the clearest identifiers of Jews and their practice of Judaism in Durban. These notions, I have argued, are a way that Jews have maintained their identities, distinguishing themselves from others and marking a boundary between those who practice these things and those who do not.

The Hindus

Hindus from India

Between 1860 and 1911 there was a large-scale migration of Indians from India to Durban under the system of indenture, with a total of 152 184 immigrants arriving during this fifty year period. The weather – hot and humid, with warm nights and practically no frost (Cole 1961:45) – and the perfect soil found in this narrow coastal region, proved ideal for growing sugar cane (Huttenback 1966:273) at a time in the nineteenth century when world demand for sugar was growing rapidly. However, there was a desperate shortage of labour. With slavery having been abolished in the 1830s, and young Zulu males resisting attempts to coerce them into wage labour (Halpern 2004:20), the sugar planters in the fledgling industry turned their eyes to India, which had already furnished indentured labourers to other sugar growing colonies, among them Trinidad, Surinam, West Indies and Mauritius (Bhana 1991:17; Vertovec 1996:111; Diesel and Maxwell 1993:1). The Indian workers, or "coolies", were induced to enter contracts for at least five years on the plantations and there was some assurance given that they would be given a full or part-paid passage back to India.

The migrants that came were recruited from three principal areas; the Madras Presidency, the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, and the Bengal Presidency featuring mainly Bihar (Bhana 1991:35; Brain 1988:210). The fee-paying passenger Indians or traders came from Gujarat and Bombay (Kumar 2000:9). These major areas from which Indians were drawn are vast in space and diverse in caste and habit; depending on the region, district and village that the recruits came from, they would exhibit differences in culture which included dress, language, food, and their labour practices reflecting agrarian, trade and manufacturing economies (Bhana 1991:34-59). It is important to note here that the indentured Hindus who came to Natal mostly came as individuals. Although there is evidence to suggest that the Hindus who came to Durban were of different castes (Brain 1988:210; Kumar 2000:9; Diesel and Maxwell 1993:10) it would appear that the lists of indentured-labourer passengers at the start of indenture between 1860 and 1877 do not reflect the caste of the south Indian passengers boarding in Madras (Kumar 2000:9), while the lists of passengers boarding at Calcutta in the north show records of caste affiliations (ibid.). However, there were many inconsistencies in the manner in which the caste names were noted; very often the caste names did not match the family names given, showing a lower or non-Brahmanical caste noted against a Brahmanical name (ibid.).

The identity of caste groups as a readily identifiable social group having ascriptive qualities of birth, endogamy, and a specialised occupation in a hierarchically ranked society, has provided the general framework for approaching caste. As such, it was the means used for collecting information and administrating Indian society under British colonial rule (Vertovec 1992:25). Such a method of collecting information on caste which "reified caste as a discrete social grouping" disregarded the "processes and meanings involving rank within certain groups" (ibid.). Given the method used for recording castes and names and the various inconsistencies associated with the process, it is difficult to know for certain what the caste was of some Hindus, especially those who came from the south of India. The disintegration of caste, it would appear, began in the motherland with the inefficiency of the colonial administration paperwork. There are, of course, other reasons given as to why caste disintegrates and this is discussed more comprehensively later in this chapter. For now, though, it is important to note that the Hindus were variegated in caste background. Among those who came to Durban were a small number of high-caste Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The majority of the Hindus were mainly from the lower castes (Pillay *et al.* 1989:145). This meant that the traditional forms of religious expression among the lower caste orders, namely the non-scriptural and ritualistic devotional practices (ibid.), informed their religious beliefs and practices.

Nineteenth century India was undergoing structural changes that provided significant factors that impelled the would-be indentured to enter into contracts. The collapse of the textile industry, famines, the restructuring of revenue and land tenure systems, massive unemployment, and the decline of the handicraft industries, are some of the diverse circumstances that drove Indians to leave their natal land (Bhana 1991:60-66; Van der Veer and Vertovec 1991:150; Vertovec 1992:7). While poverty and the accompanying urge to escape misfortune appears to be one of the main reasons for leaving India, there are also other incentives given by Hilda Kuper (1960:9) that suggest personal motives like ambition, and "restlessness of the spirit", that prompted Indians to leave. There appear to be many economic and non-economic factors encouraging emigration from India.

However, despite these factors encouraging emigration, there were also forces preventing Hindus from travelling. Some of the reasons, among others, raised by Vertovec (1992:9) who quotes W. Crook (1897), suggest that the Hindu, and his household god, occupied a very particular social position in his tribe, caste or village, buttressed by extended family, neighbours and clansmen. Leaving this stable environment meant that the migrant exposed himself to the insecurities of unknown gods and strangers

However, as Vertovec (1992:9-10) points out, internal migrations for the purposes of pilgrimage were common throughout India's past and some candidates who accepted indenture were recruited outside their place of origin.

Similarly, Desai and Vahed (2010) and Jayawardena (1968), among others, have argued that crossing the "black waters" (*kala pani*) was a "defiling and contaminating" act which led to the "dispersal of tradition, family, class, and caste classifications". And according to Emmer (1986:95) some recruits feared that they would be converted to Christianity, and the Hindus, particularly, feared that they would be made to eat beef. Clearly, the decision to leave, and the factors disposing many to leave their homeland, was no small matter, and those who left were bold to do so knowing full well that it would compromise their beliefs and practices and also their status within the communities from which they came. However, any human migration – and the Indian migration to Durban may be included – has a few important factors that must be recognised. As pointed out by N. Jayaram (2004:16), migration doesn't mean that people simply take themselves physically to another place but that migrants bring with them "a sociocultural baggage", which among other things include a "predefined social identity", "a set of religious beliefs and practices", norms governing social structure, culinary practices, and language.

More important, argues Jayaram (ibid.), is that the migrants are not irretrievably cut off from the land of their birth and that contact, whether "physical" or "mental", may be preserved by what is called the "myth of return". Also, the recognition of the migrants in their adopted land as belonging to a particular homeland has "important implications for the formation of ethnicity among a migrant community and its relationship with other ethnic groups" (ibid.).My data suggests that there are some Hindus who physically return to India to visit family who were left behind while many Hindus have not sustained relations with original families and return to India as tourists or pilgrims, purely to make contact with the motherland, and this has a certain historical meaning for them. There was no evidence from my data to suggest that Hindus would like to return permanently to India. It is clear from the interviews with Hindus that they are there in Durban to stay and as such the "myth of return" does not exist among the third and fourth generation Hindus who have been born there. What I argue below shows how the Hindus put down their religious roots in Durban. I do this by outlining the historical processes of change and adaptation accompanying the making of a people who call themselves Hindus.

Political and social background of Hindus who settled in Durban

From their first arrival in South Africa, Indians were discriminated against, being subjected, amongst other forms of discrimination, to removals, restrictions on where they could live, and limitations on their businesses. Their access to education was limited, and when they were able to attend school, their religion and culture was not valued, let alone taught (Sooklal 1991). This state of affairs was exacerbated with the advent of apartheid. In particular, there were two demographic shifts that led to the disruption of Indians: one was between 1920 and 1930, when most of the Indians left rural areas to find employment in the city; the other started in the 1950s as a consequence of the Group Areas Act, in terms of which as many as 41 782 Indian families, adding up to about 276 000 individuals, were forced to leave the city and its surrounding areas and settle outside the centre of Durban (Pillay *et al.* 1989:152). Two of the largest settlements of Indians resulting from the effects of the Group Areas Act are Chatsworth in the south and Phoenix in the north of Durban. This resettlement meant that Hindus were moved away from their places of worship (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:3).

The stress resulting from such "dislocation and the resulting disorientation" (ibid.) in the Hindu community led to large numbers of people converting to Christianity, particularly Pentecostal

Christianity: indeed, more than half of all Indian Christians in South Africa belong to some kind of Pentecostal church (Pillay *et al*. 1989:152).

In spite of these developments, a large, diverse Hindu community remains active, continuing a tradition in which indentured Indians, despite their harsh living and working conditions, continued their religious practices at home and quickly set about building the first wattle-and-daub shrines and temples for themselves. These later became wood-and-iron structures, and later still, brick and mortar buildings. From the 1880s, Hindu temples were built in Durban to cater to those labourers who had completed their contracts and begun working in the city either as municipal labourers or running their own small enterprises. Of three temples built at that time, only the Somtseu Road Hindu temple still stands (Mikula *et al.* 1982:59).

Hindus and other Indians did not passively accept their oppression. While Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps the most famous of all politically active Hindus in South Africa, in fact a long line of activists through the years established a strong tradition of resistance to oppressive laws and practices. Two prominent examples were the passive resistance campaign linked to the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946, often referred to as the Ghetto Act, and the defiance campaign following the passing of the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Bagwandeen, quoted in Diesel and Maxwell 1993:6).

Early Hinduism in Durban

The religious traditions of Hindus in Durban are the products of over one hundred and fifty years of "inadvertent permutation, deliberate alteration or innovation, and structurally necessary modification" to put it in Steven Vertovec's (2000:39) words in his description of Hinduism in the Caribbean. And to continue his line of thought for Durban, it can be said that the traditions and religion of Durban Hindus is undergoing changes and transformation and will continue to do so for various reasons and purposes. "Mutability", he argues, "is one of the hallmark characteristics of many concepts, rites, social forms and other phenomena generally subsumed under the rubric of 'Hinduism'" (Vertovec 2000:39). In Durban the historical processes of change have progressed in a way that a general feeling of the oneness of Hinduism has indeed come to exist if not in content then definitely in form; for in each of the different Hindu communities represented in this study a homogeneity created through its organisational orthodoxy has come to have a commanding influence over its practitioners, while each presents differences of beliefs and practices.

In light of the above view, in this study of dietary prohibitions and the role it plays in the preservation and maintenance of Hindu identities in Durban, I premise my work on the view held by Peter van der Veer and Steven Vertovec (1991:149) with regard to Indian communities overseas:

> To be a Hindu is neither an unchanging, primordial identity nor an infinitely flexible one which one can adopt or shed at will, depending on the circumstances. It is an identity acquired through social practice and, as such, constantly negotiated in changing contexts.

From the various accounts written of the early settlements in Durban it is clear that religion formed the base around which the migrants organised their lives (Bhana and Vahed 2006:245; Kuper 1960; Vertovec 1992:57). The Hinduism of these early migrants was a variety of village rituals that formed themselves into temple cults (Meer 1969:143) where Brahmins or the priestly class acted as "religious technicians" knowing the when, the how, and the why of the rituals performed (Hofmeyr 1982:139). From the time of their arrival, the Hindus erected little wattle and daub shrines and small temples on the sugar estates marking a crucial step in reconstructing their religious identities in the induction of their religion in Durban.[1] However, the religion of the Hindus lacked a central organisation as temples did not serve the same function of drawing the community together except for festivals and other important holy days. This lack of a central organising structure was further exacerbated by the different intra-religious sub-groupings that existed between the different language groups; the practices of the Gujerati speaking Hindus were very different from the Tamil and Telugu speaking Hindus of south India, as were those of the Hindi speaking Hindus of the north (Pillay *et al.* 1989:146), with each linguistic group keeping the traditions of their original geographical areas of emigration (Meer 1969:144). The most important aspect of Hindu practice and religious social life in this early period revolved around the parochialism of the domestic altar in the home, and this did not in any way lead to the formation of corporate gatherings. This relative isolation of practising Hindus gave them no strength in numbers, nor an *esprit de corps,* and therefore made them more vulnerable to Christian and Muslim missionary efforts.

Christian proselytisation has been conspicuously successful among Hindu immigrants and their descendants. And for many Hindus this has become a problem. I asked a senior ranking member of the Maha Sabha whether he could explain why so many Hindus convert to Christianity. His main reason given for such conversions was that Hindus practice their religion at home whereas Jews, Christians and Muslims go to places of worship and in the process find public recognition of their

faith and consequent acceptance by their respective religious communities. A home altar is a common form of worship among Hindus. However, where this form of ritual expression is absent to root the individual in faith, argues the participant, conversion to Christianity can easily take place and this seems to happen mainly among the lower socio-economic groups.[2]

Numerous participants gave various other reasons to explain the problem of conversion among Hindus to other religions, and the main points are summarised here. Many have argued that there are too many rituals in Sanathanist forms of practice that confuse young practitioners. They are also confused by the multiplicity of gods and they are unable to get clarity from their parents (who don't really have an answer) as to why there are so many gods in Hinduism. Ritualistic animal sacrifices confound them even further, making them feel like they don't know what they are doing. Furthermore, there was a lack of trained clergy to conduct ceremonies, especially at funerals, and the dearth of theologically trained teachers meant that there was no religious education. Whatever education existed was mainly present in the home, where the domestic language was taught, and where Hinduism was presented through the oral tradition of recounting its myths and legends as a way of preserving the religion (Pillay *et al.*1989:145).[3]

This situation made many Hindus susceptible to conversion – particularly to Christianity. Consequently, the Hindus seem to accept the blame for not participating in the preservation of the soul of the Hindu. This is encapsulated by Rajesh Kumar who says:

> I think we have failed...in propagating the religion to other Hindus.[4]

Yeshen Naidu, a staunch Hindu practitioner whom I interviewed, told me a story that reinforced the point of a lack of clergy and its effects on the maintenance of Hindu beliefs and practices among its followers. When a friend's mother died during the inauspicious month of *Paratassie*, it was regarded as polluting to the community of Hindus observing meticulous vegetarianism. The refusal of the Hindus to finalise the interment led to the Muslims in the community conducting the funeral, which resulted in the bereaved son converting to Islam.[5]

Also, related to the problem of conversion and the lack of trained clergy was the lack of a temple and the central role it plays in creating a congregational life for practising Hindus. A unified set of beliefs and practices was also missing, which could have served as a template according to which the Hindus might have formed their religious activities. Some of these problems are seen in an example

that is raised in the literature that points to Muharram, a Muslim festival, which mourns the martyrdom of Imam Husain, grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, who was killed in battle on the plains of Karbala in Iraq (Vahed 2002; Green 2008). While Muharram is a distinctly Muslim observance, it became, during the period of indenture, a popular form of piety adopted by Muslims and Hindus alike in Durban, disparagingly referred to by Europeans as "Coolie Christmas" (Vahed 2002:80). In his article on the constructions of community and identity among the Indians in Natal, Vahed (2002:77) has argued that the role played by the festival of Muharram during 1860-1910 was important in the formation of the Indian community and the "fusion" of Muslim and Hindu traditions made it a "pan-Indian" celebration of joint participation.

While their participation in a non-Hindu event demonstrates a sense of camaraderie on the part of the Hindus, it also points to the general attribute of Hindus and their acceptance of other religions, put very nicely by J. L. Brockington (1981:183) referring to this attitude as "Hinduism's age-old syncretistic absorptiveness". While the festival was met with disapproval from the constabulary and The Durban Town Council for its disruptiveness and loudness, leaders from the more educated side of the Hindu religious fence also voiced their condemnation of those Hindus participating in a "Mohammedan" activity. Clearly, the indentured Hindu workers who lacked knowledge of their own almanacs were not given alternative options.

It is important to note, as Hofmeyr (1982:142) has shown, that Hindus in indenture did not have access to religious calendars and that their calendars were designed along the lines of work, which made it extremely difficult to observe ritual practices and ceremonies. However, many of these difficulties would eventually be addressed but not until Hindu missionaries started arriving from the turn of the twentieth century and began their proselytising activity in their fight for the preservation of Hindu souls and spelled out more concisely what form their practices were to take.

What is shown above reflects some of the problems of a lack of a central organisation, a lack of a clearly defined set of beliefs and practices within each denomination of Hindus, and the lack of clarity as to what constitutes sacred Hindu boundaries. The problem of the lack of a central organisation was a problem already noted and accounted for in India by Hindu reformers. In order to show how new movements emerged in response to the problems of conversion and the challenges presented by the presence of other religious systems, it would be necessary to begin by showing some of the key doctrinal and sociological changes and adjustments that began in India and that would then spread to Durban where Hindus settled. These changes affect the definition of Hinduism

in Durban; for Hinduism that was once and perhaps still continues to reflect a heterogeneity in practice and belief becomes a somewhat homogenous whole, making the term Hinduism more applicable as a description of the diverse religious phenomena.

Indian Influences on Durban Hindus

During British rule in India, certain reform tendencies which began under Muslim rule were carried forward, influenced by Christian missions and Western education (Hiltebeitel 1987:357). Almost ten centuries of Islamic presence and five centuries of a Western presence in India left their influence on Hinduism, but also resulted in a reformulation of their traditional Hindu models which had to be "revived" and "applied in new and adaptive ways" (ibid.). The most notable reform movements of the nineteenth century, starting about half a century before indentured Indians arrived in Durban, began with the first of the modern Hindu reformers, Mohan Roy, whose work advocated the return to what he believed was a pure, traditional Hinduism involving worship of the "one, supreme, undivided eternal God." In 1828 he founded the Brahmo Samaj, the first of a number of Hindu reform movements that were to spring up over the course of the century as Hinduism sought to revive itself after several centuries of rule by foreign invaders, first the Mughals, then the British, by addressing the challenges of reform and modernisation.

Under the influence of the theologies of Islam and Christianity, and Western-style religious practices, the Brahmo Samaj, for example, adopted a deistic type of theism and a congregational form of worship while rejecting Brahman claims to mediation, idolatry, sacrifice, and caste.

These ideas were to influence, to varying degrees, other reform movements that were formed in India throughout the 19th century. Two important movements as far as Hindus in Durban are concerned are the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna movements. The religion of the Arya Samaj was formed in Bombay by Swami Dayanand Saraswati who proclaimed Hinduism to be a single religion based on a single authoritative text, which comprised a collection of several sacred texts, the Vedas. This transformed version of Hinduism advocated no images and all rituals that were important to religious practices in India were eliminated (Pillay *et al.* 1989:145-170). The Arya Samaj developed a system of beliefs that was based on one deity who was the creator and sustainer of the universe making clear, hitherto unknown, pronouncements of monotheistic conceptions of God. The distinguishing feature of this movement, theologically speaking, is that the eternal and formless God does not take on any human or non-human form and as such the Arya Samaj do not accept

incarnations of God. This means that the concept of avatar, or descent of the deity, is absent. The places of worship, therefore, contain no images and representations (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:66) of gods and goddesses, or mythological beings.

The Ramakrishna movement has its doctrinal beginnings in the ideas of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a Hindu saint, who experimented with Hindu, Islamic, and Christian forms of worship in his search for salvation and rejected the idea of competition and conflict between the religions (Meer 1969:143). The result was a synthesis of the various concepts of God under a single framework, and he invited followers of other faiths to share in the benefits of such open-mindedness without giving up their own religious expressions. The movement, which was established by his disciple, Swami Vivekananda, has been extremely successful in propagating Hinduism outside India in the Hindu diaspora, and has been intellectually influential; Bhaktism, which is the loving devotion to one's personal god, becomes reinterpreted as service to one's fellow man, and the emphasis is removed from ritual and placed on theology and philosophy.

Furthermore, what M. N. Srinivas and A. M. Shah (1968:365) say about the parochial Hindu phenomena in modern India bolsters the idea outlined above, and anticipates the changes that would take place in Durban. They argue that India's parochial village-level practices are giving way to the classical forms or categories of Hindu belief, where the local gods and goddesses, associated with sickness and epidemics are "losing ground", making way for the "prestigious Sanskritic deities".

A series of Hindu missions were dispatched to Durban from India, and the earliest and most influential of these missions began with Bhai Parmanand who is described as the first "Vedic missionary", in 1905, under whose authorship the Hindu Young Men's association was established (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:66; Desai and Vahed 2010:248) imploring its members to learn Tamil, travel to India to understand their culture and religion, and educate their children (Vahed 2002:90). Bhai Parmanand's missionary activities continued with the arrival of Swami Shankeranand, a reform-oriented Hindu missionary from the Punjab, three years later in 1908 when he focused on restructuring Hindu society and eradicating rituals that were considered outside the parameters of the religion (Naidoo 1992:7). Most notable among his mission activities was the continued condemnation of the participation of local Hindus in the festival of Muharram instead of festivals, such as *Divali*, associated with Hindu practices and worship. After denouncing such behaviour as being inconsistent with the religious sensibilities of Hindus, the Swami made appeals to government to set aside 12 November 1909 as a religious holiday for indentured Hindus to celebrate the festival

of *Divali* (Vahed 2002:91). However, Vahed (2002:92) has argued that the efforts of the Swami and other local educated Hindus did not immediately put a stop to Hindu participation in the non-Hindu festival of Muharram – not at least, he says, until the various Hindu movements were placed under the auspices of the Hindu Maha Sabha.

In 1912, The South African Maha Sabha, or "Great Society", was formed after the first South African conference for Hindus was held in Durban, and over which Swami Shankaranand would preside (Vahed 2013; Diesel and Maxwell 1993:6). The agenda was to conceive of ways to make Hindu teachings accepted and favoured, to establish the conference as a permanent institution, and to create an administrative structure to pursue the aims of the conference by forming links with the various Hindu societies in the country (Vahed 2013:29).

In Vahed's (2013) article on the formation of The Hindu Maha Sabha, it is clear that the beginnings of this representative body were rather inauspicious; in his presidential speech Swami Shankaranand showed contempt for Indians (saying that Indians tended to squabble amongst themselves if not properly organised) and was critical of Gandhi (arguing that Gandhi did not do much to help the poor Hindus) thus inferring that Hindus needed to be under the direction and leadership of a strong national body (Vahed 1997:21). What Swami Shankaranand wanted was to improve the plight of the Hindus by improving education, giving them social and economic mobility, and establishing Hindu organisations. Although Swami Shankaranand's controversial inaugural speech put up the backs of many Hindus in attendance, the conference had the important effect of raising the consciousness of Hindus and in establishing an institution that would become the voice of the voiceless Hindus.

Two major points have emerged from Swami Shankaranand's vision in the creation of the Maha Sabha: one, the festival of *Divali* has become instituted as a major national celebration with fixed calendar dates and, two, the religion of the Hindus finally came under the spotlight of an overarching body in a way that suggests that the Maha Sabha stands as a custodian of the now official Hindu religion by unifying some major practices and festivals, thereby marking the borders of Hindu identity.

It would appear that the initial conception of its founder member still continues despite the inactivity of the organisation during some periods and the various internal struggles it has endured over many years, highlighted in the work of Thillayvel Naidoo (1992). A high ranking member of the Hindu Maha Sabha outlined to me the current position of the organisation. The Maha Sabha, he

said, represents ninety five per cent of Hindu movements in South Africa and is the "official spokes-body for all Hindus in the country". What the participant appears to be saying is that Hindus were somewhat ignored in the past and their religion was disparaged, and there was no reasoned defence and systematic cultivation of its own members. In the last ten years the infrastructure of the Maha Sabha has been expanded and this, he suggests, has given them the organisational clout to take on the "challenges" and "conflict" that face Hindus in the country. Furthermore, the formation of a "mediation arbitration committee" and its recognition by South Africa's High Court, allows disputes to be settled in a legally recognised forum. [6]

However, the task of the Maha Sabha is a difficult one and it is evident that it does not succeed on all levels. For example, another participant in this study, Niren Singh, who works closely with the organisation, has raised some of the difficulties in trying to bring together the different linguistic groups. He seems to say that it could well be a problem of different "egos" within the organisation and this presents difficulties when attempting to consolidate a group like the Maha Sabha. However, their problems are not just about the issue of personality clashes and language but lie with the acceptance of certain Hindu practices, such as animal sacrifices, which continue in certain temples and which are condemned by the Maha Sabha.[7]

There are some aspects of the Maha Sabha which work well, such as the establishment of the Hindu calendar and the fixing of dates for annual festivals, and may be regarded as a positive part of their work, as was mentioned by one the participants who works in these matters at the Maha Sabha. In this department, the Maha Sabha appears to get the full support and co-operation of its members, and a certain amicability prevails among the various representatives of the different linguistic groups – Tamils, Telegus, Gugeratis, and Hindis – as they consolidate the dates for the major and minor festivals. [8]

Clearly, then, while the Maha Sabha has been established to unify the different Hindu groups and in many respects does so fairly successfully, its remit is also limited. It cannot dictate on matters of faith or practice to the various groups within Hinduism, and the setting of dates for particular festivals must be done through patient negotiation with these groups. Perhaps it should be seen as more of a political or socially unifying body that negotiates with the non-Hindu world on behalf of the Hindu community, rather than a sort of religious or ecumenical council that sets down doctrinal dogma that all Hindus should follow. It is obvious that this latter function is zealously guarded as the prerogative of each grouping under the broader heading of Hinduism. This reflects the way that

Hinduism appears to have always operated – that particular practices and beliefs vary enormously while still falling under a very broadly defined concept of Hinduism.

More specifically, what unifies Hindus is not any kind of central organisation, but a practice that is common to all of them – the prohibition on the eating of the cow. They may be separated linguistically, by different beliefs, and by arguments about rituals such as sacrifice, yet there is a core thread that unifies them all – the sanctity of the cow. While the neo-Hindu movements are perhaps stricter in emphasising this as a core part of the religion, the Sanathanists also recognise the cow's sanctity and it plays a central role in the practice of their form of Hinduism.

A brief history of caste

There is very little information on the food of the early Hindus in Durban except for fragments of information that can be gleaned from anecdotes about life on the ships, and then later we are given a list of the weekly and monthly rations that they received when in the Port of Natal working on the estates. But even before they arrived in Natal, C.G. Henning (1993:29) has pointed to the difficulties the Indians experienced while on board the ship; being of different castes, religions, and languages they would have encountered each other for the first time in the confinement of the ship. Hennings (ibid.) has argued that the initial forms of mixing would have been difficult and this was particularly evident at meal times. Hindus, he argues, refused to eat with people of other religious persuasions and social groups for fear of losing their castes.

However, the early culinary habits of Hindus in Durban cannot be discussed without some broad understanding of the system of caste and the place of food in the daily lives of pre-indenture Hindus. It is not possible to address all the issues of caste in India, which applies to all aspects of life including religion, personal conduct, health, and justice. I, therefore, limit my concern to some fundamental rules of the caste system concerning food, and how this has a bearing on caste membership and relationships.

The word caste comes from the Portuguese word *casta* which signifies "breed, race or kind" (Hutton 1946:42) or "properly" as Dumont (1980:21) states "something not mixed". However, in order to understand caste one would have to understand the more ancient concept of *varna*, which has been superseded by caste, although as Dumont says (ibid.:67), the theory of *varnas* has certain functions in the understanding of caste.

The term *varna*, which literally meant colour, comes from the Vedas and was used before the word caste to distinguish the light-skinned Aryans from the dark-skinned tribes of India (Srinivas 2002:161). The Vedic institution of *varna* is divided into four categories, beginning with the highest: Brahman (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (traders and agriculturalists or merchants in modern usage), and Shudra (unskilled labourers, servants, and the dispossessed) (Srinivas 2002:174; Dumont 1980:67). The fifth category, which is not included in the four *varnas,* are the Untouchables – those who by social and religious practice are segregated from mainstream Indian society by custom or law.

The concept of *varna*, as it evolved to become caste, has grown from four categories (though if one includes the Untouchables it becomes five), to over 3000 castes and sub-castes. Dumont (1980:67) criticises those anthropologists who view *varna* as having no relation to the present social reality whereas, he argues, *varna* has certain existing features present in caste. The broad divisions, for example the place of the Brahman in the hierarchy, remain.

There have been many suggestions of how caste was derived and they include, among others, tribal, racial, (also referred to as the Dravidian or Indo-European theory), (Dumont 1980:27-28), occupational, territorial, and religious elements. The racial idea for caste appears to be most prevalent (Dumont 1980:28), which has its beginnings with the invasion of India by the Indo-Europeans about 1500 BC as is enjoined in the religious text of the *Rigveda*. These Vedic people spoke an Indo-European language and their religion was based on nature, recorded in the hymns and sayings in the same text (Hutton 1946:5). Caste derives its impetus from this theory in which the two groups, the invaders and the autochthonous people of India, come into conflict; the Indo-Europeans wanted to keep their purity and maintain their blood group and therefore instituted the idea of “closed groups” (Dumont 1980:28); hence the system of *varna*.

The Vedic Indians were a pastoral people and Dumont (1980:147) has noted that only the meat of animals religiously sacrificed was eaten because animals were considered valuable. Therefore, Dumont is not surprised when cow veneration later becomes important, given the religious attitude that the Vedic Indians had toward animals. The praises of the cow in particular were already sung in the Vedas as a “cosmic symbol, the universal mother and the source of food” (Dumont 1980:147). However, Hutton (1946:199) has pointed out that the cow was also revered by the Indians of south India who were, incidentally, pastoral types as well. It would appear then, that there was no conflict

of interest between both the Vedic Indians and the autochthonous Indian people regarding cow veneration.

At the end of the Vedic period, which coincided with the beginning of the Christian era, large scale changes took place in Indian society. It was a period of great social and religious reform and at the same time society was moving from *varna*-based tradition to a caste-based society. At about half a millennium after the Vedic period, the advent of two new religions, Buddhism and Jainism, introduced changes which called for the abandonment of social life and the full commitment to personal devotion in the form of ascetic and monastic practices. These two religions advocated the doctrine of *ahimsa,* which, according to Dumont (1980:148), translates as a reluctance to kill any living being. Consequently, these renouncer religions demanded vegetarianism, which not only made them attractive but prestigious as well. The Hindu Brahmans who were challenged by the introduction of the doctrines of *ahimsa*, vegetarianism, and principles of renunciation espoused by the Buddhist and Jain theologies, and whose spiritual leadership was in danger of being "outclassed", were "goaded into emulation" and adopted vegetarianism as a practice (ibid.:194) and became teetotal (Srinivas 2002:183).

The doctrine of *ahimsa*, which inferiorised beef-eating and the consumption of meat of any kind by making the "horror of meat" harmonise with ideas of impurity (Dumont 1980:194), was subsequently more widely taken up and remains in Hinduism as its most important ethical principle. Added to this were the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth (which were prevalent in late Vedic thought), and which continued until they were widely accepted in modern Hindu India (Brown 1961:430) and became fossilised in Hindu beliefs and practices in Durban. The high value originally ascribed to the cow in the Vedic period (where the cow was accorded deep respect but was also sacrificed ritually) would lead to the sanctity of the cow at the beginning of the Christian era (when the cow becomes an object of worship, its killing being considered equal to the murder of a Brahman, and the by-products of the cow – milk, *ghee*, buttermilk/curd, cow dung, and urine – become purifactory agents) (Dumont 1980:148-150; Brown 1961:430; Srinivas 2002:183).

Returning to the structure of caste, the main features that arise from the definitions are: members of a particular caste cannot marry outside the caste; similar restrictions are placed on commensality with a member of another caste; occupations are fixed; there are some hierarchical gradations of caste, the Brahmans being the highest caste; birth determines one's caste for life unless one is expelled for violating its rules; otherwise transition from one caste to another is not possible in some

castes while it is possible in others (Ketkar 1909:15; Dumont 1980:21). There is a hierarchy in diet and occupation although this varies from region to region. Caste therefore hinges on three aspects for its continuity and the maintenance of separateness: marriage, food, and occupation.

For castes to remain as separate units marriage must be endogamous (Srinivas 2002:59). Thus a closed group is created which is "permanent, exclusive and self-sufficient" (Dumont 1980:112). This is not to say, however, that inter-caste marriages do not occur. Dumont (1980:113) has shown that these kinds of marriages do take place provided that there is no loss of status. Separation of castes by marriage is further consolidated by taboos on food and drink. After all, it will not be possible for a man to marry a woman whose cooked food he and his household are unable to eat (Hutton 1946:63). Perfect commensality can only be achieved when people eating together can receive cooked food and water from each other. Food accepted from a lower caste person by someone of a higher caste is deemed polluting and can be remedied by a purifactory process of reversing the pollution incurred. The cooking of food is very important and is guarded from strangers and lower castes lest it becomes contaminated. As Hutton (1946:63) has written, "a stranger's shadow...or even the glance of a man of low caste...falling in the cooking pot may necessitate throwing away its contents".

There appear to be two types of food that determine transactions between castes: food cooked in water or *kachcha* food, and food cooked in *ghee* or *pakka* food. *Kachcha* food is regarded as polluting, while the latter is acceptable to the highest caste, the Brahmans, because it is cooked in *ghee – a* by-product of the cow, which is said to sanctify food prepared with this ingredient.

There are also restrictions placed on the use of certain animals as food. Here are some examples given by Hutton (1946:67): The untouchable Chamar or leather-worker caste is most likely to consume beef and this is a good example of the culinary habits of a caste tied with the occupation of the caste. Some castes are in theory purely vegetarian but this, argues Hutton, will depend on the sect. *Vaishnaivas* are vegetarian while *Shaivas* and *Shaktas* are not. Where meat is consumed, the "more respectable castes eschew the domestic fowl and...pig" in favour of the flesh of sheep, goat and game. The flesh of the cow, therefore, is regarded as the lowest form of food followed by the pig, fowl, sheep, and goat. Vegetables rank the highest in the hierarchy of the most acceptable form of food. Most respectable castes eat fish in Bengal, whereas the idea of eating fish for the people in the Rajputana desert is repugnant (ibid.). The Brahmans, of course, will not consume the flesh of any animal, fish or bird, nor eggs (Srinivas 2002:60). Brahmans also abstain from onions and garlic or

alliums and some will not even eat tomatoes because the seeds present in them are taken to be "living" elements (Dumont 2002:141). However, not all Brahmins are vegetarians; Srinivas (2002:201) has noted that there are three groups of Brahmins, namely the Saraswat, Kashmiri, and the Bengali Brahmans who are non-vegetarians and to this list can be added the meat-eating Kanya-Kubja Brahmans of Katyayan in Khare's (1966) study, thus adding a further complexity to dietary habits of the Brahmans.

The classification of man and the relationship between groups and the taxonomic complexity involved in such classification is discussed in studies by R. S. Khare (1976), Arjun Appadurai (1981), and Edward B. Harper (1964). The cosmic significance and religious meaning of the caste system offers insights into the particular nature of the relationship between man and god. Khare (1976), for example, shows how classical Hindu thought underlies current practices dealing with all aspects of food, from its production to its distribution and its eventual consumption. He argues that Hindus regard food in all its forms as representing, in essence, the cosmos, and in particular, man's relations to the gods. In this regard, human beings and gods co-produce food: the gods by providing soil, rain and other essential elements, and humans by applying themselves physically to the task of farming it, aided by their farming implements. Human beings share their produce with the gods, in the form of offerings, to assure future co-operation, and eat what is left over – the *prasadam*. Extending from this relationship between man and gods are a host of ideas about the kinds of food and the way food should be ranked according to its relationship to users, eaters, and cooks; appropriate foods for different occasions such as weddings and funerals; rules about giving and receiving food; and rules about food distribution, transactions, and exchanges.

India's caste system is thousands of years old and can vary enormously from region to region. It is inevitably extremely complex. I have necessarily had to take a very broad overview of its history, structure, and function in order to understand those remnants of the system which continue to shape current beliefs and practices of Hinduism in Durban. The view taken here does suggest that castes are hierarchically placed in relation to one another and notions of purity and pollution are subsumed in this framework as is shown in the work of Dumont (1980) and Srinivas (2002). This view, however, has been criticised by anthropologists in India in recent years. Within the ritual domain, as Vertovec (1992:28) says, concepts of purity, pollution and hierarchy are "powerful and pervasive" but it does not constitute the whole essence of caste. In considering the subject of caste other types of caste relations should be examined such as economic and political factors within a specific context so that these domains may be taken into account as well (ibid.). What seems to have

survived of caste in Durban are the “powerful and pervasive” elements of purity, pollution, and hierarchy, brought by the Hindus who arrived 150 years ago and which underlies most of the work in this chapter on Hindus.

The indentured Hindus that came were caste divided as surmised from their behaviour on the ships and in the reports such as the one given by Henning. And as I have said earlier, Hindus, Christians, and Muslims were placed together into barracks which forced cohabitation which would begin the fragmentation of caste. There was also a shortage of women which made it very difficult to continue notions of endogamy which was essential for the maintenance and preservation of caste as a system. The initial precondition set by the Indian government required that four women be brought to South Africa for every ten men. However, very few women were prepared to undertake this journey given the newness and uncertainty of conditions abroad (Diesel 2003:36) which meant that the desired number of women to men was unbalanced. When Hilda Kuper made the first study of Indians in Natal in the 1960s in which she examined the concept of caste, she reported that caste was still prevalent among certain Hindus as an aspect of prejudice and informing personal style. By the time I get to my study in 2010, I find no evidence in my data that caste still survives in its functional form and that it no longer operates as a system of classification that determines social and religious structures. Nor does it affect social interaction among and within the various Hindu groups that I have observed. And as Gurharpal Singh (2003:4) has said of caste in South Africa: “... caste identities have dissolved because, amongst other reasons, their maintenance was of little value to the Indian immigrants, drawn as they were from the lower ranks of the caste hierarchy.” However, H.C. Brookfield and M.A. Tatham (1957:50) say that caste and caste pride has persisted particularly among the Gujarati who were of a high caste. On the other hand, they point out that the “complex internal pluralism” created by caste “has nonetheless been blurred by a common “Indian” feeling engendered by the application of national and municipal policies to all Indians, and also by a widespread and increasingly pervasive westernization”. Caste was an issue I had not specifically aimed to pursue and was not something I questioned my participants about. The issue was never raised by my participants either and there was no evidence to suggest that it exists. Only one of the Hindu participants in this study had alluded to caste as part of an answer he gave me when I had asked him about whether he had been a vegetarian all his life. And even he has suggested that caste has disappeared or appears very little and referred to the older members of his own family, now deceased, who practised caste.[9]

However, on rethinking my data it became clearer that to explain certain elements that underlie the beliefs and practices of the Hindus in Durban it was necessary to understand their origins in the caste system of India. Although the overt manifestation of caste appears to have disappeared, there is still a shadow of caste that remains in subsequent practices and beliefs. For example, on the question of marriage there was enough evidence to suggest that inter-marriage between the different Hindu linguistic groups is now practiced to a larger degree than was previously the case, as is revealed by many participants who are themselves engaged in such cross-linguistic relationships, as are many of their children and other members of their families.

There were also questions of the place of the cow; although there is evidence for its avoidance that is scripturally enjoined, my data showed that there are some Hindus who eat the cow and some who avoid it. Ideas of purity and pollution regarding food and the by-products of the cow also came up regularly in the data. Since rules of purity cannot be separated from rules governing pollution (Douglas 1966), it would appear that wherever there are rules governing pollution there are corollary codes for reversing the condition. Thus, the rituals of purity are associated with rituals of pollution such as those associated with bodily functions of sex and death, and those associated with emissions from the body; saliva, menstrual blood, and the afterbirth are considered polluting. This affirms the point made by William Robertson Smith (1927:446) that "holy and unclean things" have restrictions placed on "men's use and contact with them" and that the breach of these restrictions has negative consequences for the worshippers. There had to be another source of explanation for these practices, and many answers were found in the traditional doctrines of the caste system coupled with modern ideas, which arose through missionary enterprises operating amongst Hindus in Durban.

Having briefly considered caste in its historical context in India, I go back to the early food habits of the indentured Hindus in Durban.

Early culinary habits of Hindus in Durban

The culinary biographies of the early Hindus in Durban are obscure except for small anecdotes and information contained in the food ration records. From the information given by C. G. Henning (1993:31) it seems that fish may have been a staple among the indentured Indians. This is confirmed by an example of food rations given to the workers which, in addition to salt fish, included rice, or pounded maize, *dhal, ghee*, and salt (Swan 1988:118; Henning 1993:44). Maureen Swan (ibid.) and

Fatima Meer (1969:117-8) concur that fishing and gardening were necessary activities taken up for subsistence but also to produce an income. However, apart from the fact, mentioned above, that Hindus feared that they may be made to eat beef having left their homeland, there is no evidence to suggest that their fears were founded; they were never forced to eat beef. If indeed they did it would be more likely voluntary.

There is, however, one incident concerning cows in Durban which, I believe, says much about early Hindu veneration for the cow and deep-rooted feelings associated with the accompanying taboo. The incident occurred in 1909 when Swami Shankaranand, a Hindu missionary, worked among the Hindus in Durban; two cows were afflicted with tick-fever and the Town Council wanted to put them down. The Swami arranged a mass meeting bringing together about two thousand Hindus to protest against such action. In appealing to the strong emotional undercurrent amongst the Hindus present, he emphasised the sacredness of the cow for Hindu religion by suggesting that killing cows is worse than the murder of humans (Vahed 2010:253) or, as I have mentioned above, killing a cow is equal to the murder of a Brahman (Dumont 1980:148-150; Brown 1961:430; Srinivas 2002:183).

The emotional spirit of the occasion and the anger which was displayed by members of the "Hindoo" community was captured in a report which appeared in the African Chronicle (quoted in Vahed 1997:8). This line expresses the sentiment held for the cow:

> Women were crying and shedding torrents of tears as if their very children were being snatched away by the mighty hand of the messenger of death.

This incident would seem to indicate a strong depth of emotional feeling that Hindus have for the cow. It also reflects positively on the work by the Swami in conscientising the early Hindus in Durban in the beliefs and values of their religion.

Among the participants in this study the virtues of the cow and the sentiments of reverence attached to this animal are well known and confirm that attitudes have remained consistent over nearly a century.

However, while the subject of this thesis is to establish whether the avoidance of the cow on the part of observant Hindus leads to the formation of religious identities, the Maha Sabha cannot give any kind of ruling regarding the prohibition of the cow. This is because the Maha Sabha is not a body that can dictate on matters of faith and its areas of authority are therefore delineated; it co-

ordinates, it represents and mediates conflict but it cannot dictate to its members. The organisation, therefore, cannot dictate to its member organisations as to whether the flesh of the cow may be eaten or not. A member of the Maha Sabha who participated in this study confirms this point but seems to say that the onus should be placed on the Maha Sabha. The participant suggests that the cow is still consumed among some Hindus and that the problem continues because of a lack of education. According to Kovlin Raju, "If the Maha Sabha would send out literature and talk about these things we might be able to still preserve these ideas in the Hindu community. Our biggest problem is that we don't have an educational organisation to say let us all [observe] the finer elements within Hinduism". What Kovlin suggests is that Sanathanist and Bhakti Hindus should consider moving to the neo-Hindu movements because they are endowed with the appropriate literature and this enables them to communicate effectively with their adherents.[10]

What I want to argue now is that the prohibition on not eating beef, although present among adherents of Sanathanist or Bhakti forms of devotional expressions in Hindusim, is a practice that becomes more widely implemented through the religious injunctions and sacred narratives of the neo-Hindu movements and that the role these movements play in homogenising Hinduism is an important one in transforming this religion from a ritualistic practice to a more communal, organisational and doctrinally based interpretation of Hinduism.

This is not to say that that the diversity in Hindu thought and practice does not still prevail. As Fatima Meer (1969:144) has pointed out, "practically every form of Hinduism, ranging from the most abstract to the most concrete is practised..." in Durban. This is the discussion that follows.

The role of the neo-Hindu movements in creating homogeneity among Hindus in Durban.

The religion of the Hindus in Durban is reflected in the currents ensuing from the wave of missionary activity that started at the beginning of the early twentieth century culminating in the formation of Arya Samaj, the neo-Vedanta organisations such as the Ramakrishna and Divine Life movements, and Hare Krishna, and these are distinguished from the traditional, orthodox Sanathanism reflecting the wide diversity and the variegation of belief and practices among the Hindus of Durban. However, in contrast to the Sanathanist or Bhakti practices of Hinduism, the neo-Hindu groups are characterised by features that reveal regular communal religious services; an emphasis on the value of reading basic scripture and religious literature; contemplative religious practices, including yoga and meditation, and the practice of some traditional rituals; and generally an avoidance of some of

the customary observances of Sanathanists. And although home-based rituals continue among the practitioners of the neo-Hindu movements, sporadic forms of Sanathanist practice have crystallised into more definite and organised forms of practice in ritual and festivals.

A few Hindus who participated in this study migrated from Sanathanist or Bhakti devotional practices to neo-Hindu movements and now offer a very different view of their previous practices. What seems to have happened, as evidenced from my data, was that there was, among Hindus, a sort of revival which led to the internal conversions of Sanathanists to neo-Hindu forms of practice. For example, Romilla Gopinath, who had been a Sanathanist before she converted to the Hare Krishna movement, argues that her parents were ill-informed about their practices and her conversion to this movement has made a theological difference in her understanding of its henotheistic practices; one god from a pantheon of gods is adopted for worship. What's more is that she is "getting the opportunity to study" her religion and participate in its congregational life.[11]

Sivan Mudaliar, too, another example of someone who has converted to a neo-Hindu movement, points to the difference in the style of worship and its emphasis on non-ritualistic forms of practice. For him it was "a radical shift" from "temple worship" to the neo-Hindu movement. Although these are both Hindu-based practices, he says, referring to Sanathanist and neo-Hindu forms of practice, the "manner of worship and the focus is diametrically opposite each other".[12]

Those who converted to neo-Hindu movements often alluded to the confusion surrounding the myriad rituals and the multiplicity of gods and goddesses to be found in their former Hindu practices. And some expressed frustration at the lack of organisation and education in the ritual-based movements. It would also appear from the evidence in the data that the non-consumption of beef was perhaps less enforced in the earlier forms of Hindu religious practice. Those Hindus who converted to neo-Hinduism report a corresponding change in dietary practice as well, with a particular emphasis on not eating the cow.

Ajay Prasad said to me that he ate beef and pork while still observing Sanathanist practices and enjoyed it at the time. He also admits to not really understanding why the cow was sacred. Now he has "the highest respect for the cow" and has become aware of the virtues of its by-products as well.[13] Similarly Shoba Chopra also confesses to a lack of understanding regarding what constituted correct eating practices until she joined the Hare Krishna movement.[14]

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness as a Hindu movement[15] reflecting both traditional and neo-Hindu elements

I have included the Hare Krishna movement in this study to illustrate the elements of both the traditional and neo-Hindu approaches which are present to varying degrees in this group.

This movement represents one of the five major Hindu groups in Durban, and therefore two devotees were selected from this branch of Hinduism to participate in the study. The Hare Krishna movement is slightly anomalous in terms of placing it in a specific category; although it falls broadly under the rubric of neo-Hindu movements, it cannot be classified as either neo-Vedanta or Arya Samaj, but constitutes a unique blend of "traditional, Puranic, philosophical, ritualistic, and innovatively devotional elements" (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:79). In other words, it is a movement that combines Sanathanist practices with neo-Hindu elements and a formalised doctrine. Furthermore, this movement has a founder (unlike Hinduism generally speaking) whose name is attached to the organisation. And most fundamental to this movement is the singling out of one god, Krishna, from the pantheon of gods in Hinduism. These points – a founder, common doctrine, and its characteristic henotheistic character – give this group their distinctiveness and are a mark of their identity. Boundaries are formed by the sanctification of a prescribed authoritative religious text, festivals that are spelled out and noted in calendars, and daily ritual which is ordered and routinised in a way that keeps all its members ritually bound in the formularies.

There are three categories under which a number of activities associated with purity and pollution among the adherents of the Hare Krishna movement may be viewed. They are bodily functions, social bonding, and the maintenance of sacred boundaries (Preston 1987:92-99). I used these categories as a way of facilitating my analysis of the complex behaviour I observed and the data I collected during my interviews. These categories are not discrete; they complement each other and exist within the same worldview. Each of these categories is discussed below.

Firstly, pollution associated with bodily functions is linked to ideas of dirt (Douglas 1966) and is "linked into complex symbolic systems" (Preston 1987:92). The most notable feature among the Hare Krishnas is to be found in pollution regarding the human body. Thus food and drink that is potentially polluting is avoided. Contaminated foods spell danger and are avoided by keeping the elaborate rules, all of which begin in the kitchen, that are required for the preparation and cooking

of food, the choice of ingredients, and the hierarchy of cooks needed to prepare offerings to deities and which are then consumed by humans afterwards.

Eating meat has negative soteriological consequences and is therefore avoided. The cow is accorded the highest worth, and eating its flesh is condemned. Food also has to be protected from impure persons such as menstruating women, lest they contaminate the food. The cooking of food presented for offerings, therefore, can only be prepared, handled and cooked by devotees of the highest calibre and status. For this reason, too, the tasting of food during cooking is not permitted. The devotees who cook wear masks to stop them from smelling the food before it is offered to the deity (Stillson 1974). Apart from the unclean food that the body should not touch and consume, it also has to be protected from the pollution that any form of sexual activity may impart. Although I had not directly asked the participants about sex, it inadvertently came up in various interviews (and not just with the Hare Krishna participants) that spouses in the marriage kept separate rooms. Sexual activity was also avoided or refrained from before making an appearance at the temple for prayer or festival. These are some of the ways in which the body had to be kept clean or pure.

Secondly, pollution and social bonding is a category under which bodily functions which involve impurities are hedged round with strict social rules to contain their polluting elements. Birth, adolescence, marriage, and death, are linked to these stages, and are “highly controlled and ritualised to ensure protection from the dangers of pollution” (Preston 1987:93). In this category, too, menstruation is considered polluting. For example, in the context of religious functions, women are excluded from participating in rituals and ceremonies during menstruation, in the belief that menstruating women and menstrual blood are polluting and have the power to contaminate the people and objects they come into contact with (Lawrence 1982). This may be a reason for the separation of the sexes in the temples. However, it was clear that menstruating women did not enter temples at all.

While the strict Hindu social system found in caste prohibits exogamous marriage and inter-caste commensality, a similar system is found among the Hare Krishnas. Although caste as a system does not appear to exist overtly among these Hindus, there appear to be rules regarding marriage; outside the confines of group beliefs and practices this is not encouraged. For example, the Hare Krishna devotees would like their children to marry within the fold, as was found among other neo-Hindu movements as well. Similarly, commensality occurs mainly among people who are like themselves. The restrictions begin with prohibitions and prescriptions required in their diets, and

therefore limit possibilities for eating with those who do not have similar restrictions placed on them. This, then, bolsters the preservation and maintenance of group purity.

Thirdly, pollution and the maintenance of sacred boundaries involves issues of sacred pollution. It would appear that the rules associated with pollution are stricter for those who are dedicated and committed to religious life than the ordinary laity. Among the Hare Krishna devotees, the idea of being set apart for the specific purpose of worshipping their god is visible in the signs and the distinct markings they adopt, such as their clothing, diacritical markings, shaven heads for monks, and purification rites associated with purifying that which is impure into that which can be "integrated into the religious sphere" (Preston 1987:95). Fire, water, cleaning agents, and purgation are "purificatory mechanisms" for making everything clean and "eliminating" pollution for the individual and the community (ibid.).

How, asks Dumont (1980:51), "is impurity to be remedied?" "Through the bath", he answers, "water is the great purificatory agent". Ritual bathing is mandatory among Hindus as it is required before worship at home and in the temple. The gods cannot be approached without the prerequisite ablutions. Most of the participants in this study when asked to describe their daily ritual practices always began with ablutions after rising, usually before sunrise, followed by the recitation of morning prayers. Copious amounts of water and other ingredients are also used in the *abhishekam* or ritual bathing of the deity in preparation for religious ceremonies. [16]

Ghee, one of the five by-products of the cow and therefore a pure ingredient, is also a purificatory agent that makes cooked food acceptable for consumption: food cooked in *ghee* is thus *pakka* food, making it pure and increasing its resistance to impurity (Dumont 1980:83).

Among the Hare Krishna devotees who are committed to the monastic order, another form of cleansing takes place; male renunciates usually purge themselves by removing their hair, thereby serving to cleanse themselves of defilement. The removal of hair also denotes a symbolic cessation of worldly life and entry into the new spiritual order. Hare Krishna monks, however, do not shave the entire head, but leave a small tuft of hair or *sikha* to distinguish them from other monks.

Lastly, clothing seems to feature very prominently among observant Hindus and the choice of clothing is governed by concepts of purity and pollution and linked to various concepts of purification as discussed above. For it is not just that devotees should be cleansed before beseeching

the gods, but that they should also be wearing fresh, clean, and appropriate clothing to complete the requirement of external purity. Purity of dress is governed by the various voluntary and involuntary secretions and excretions of the body (Joshi 1992:215). Joshi explains that clothes worn after the daily bath are purer than those worn when secretions and excretions expose the wearer to impurity. Because all rituals are "moments of transition" the "right dress, style, material, and colour" must be selected for use (ibid.:216). Hindus make a distinction between clothes worn in daily life, and clothes worn for religious occasions. Each occasion has prescribed requirements for keeping the dress code, and there are some basic rules in terms of which silk and cotton are always acceptable, and the sari for women and the dhoti for men, as unstitched garments, are the requisite dress (ibid.:217).

Enshrined in the common doctrine is the taboo on the eating of the flesh of the cow and generally other meat-eating as well. This taboo is not an isolated belief but is inlayed into a complex structure of beliefs, practices, and prescriptions for food, eating, commensality, and marriage for the Hare Krishna devotees. The traditional elements of this movement are reflected in their practices, many of which are couched in the vestiges of the system of caste. For example, the inviolability and sanctity of the cow and the extolment of its maternity, as mother or *gai mata,* is reminiscent of the practices of the highest group in the caste system, namely the Brahmans. The scriptural basis of this avoidance and the cow's veneration is well known among the adherents of this group. Furthermore, the by-products of the cow and their extensive use in ritual, and especially the use of *ghee* for cooking, appear to be remnants of caste as it appeared in the motherland.

Much of Eliade's language in *The Sacred And The Profane* (1959) on religious spaces informs the way in which I have perceived the religious space of the Hare Krishnas. For religious man, according to Eliade (1959:20), "space is not homogenous" and sacred space is "qualitatively different", which distinguishes it from other spaces, and is therefore "strong [and] significant". The sacred space fixes one to a point, bringing order to the "chaos of homogeneity" (ibid.:23). In light of the above, the temple of the Hare Krishnas represents this break in homogeneity, not only through its aesthetic features, but by the structure and form of its conceptual philosophy, and in the manner in which it becomes a "significant" space for worshippers. This particular sacred space merges traditional aspects of Hinduism, namely the installation of a central deity and the ritual attached to it, and the order and liturgy typical of neo-Hindu practice, thereby combining features of Sanathanism and the more modern forms of Hindusim.

While the sacred geography of the Hare Krishna space is very important for this group of believers in maintaining their daily religious practices, the space also serves to anchor the followers of this movement to a fixed place, which is important and necessary for the maintenance of their religious and social identities. Furthermore, the specificity of festivals, ceremonies, and important prayers are noted in calendars and observed fastidiously. These practices have given form and meaning to the adherents where previously they had been absent. As a way of knowing themselves and differentiating themselves from others the Hare Krishna people "announce" (Goffman 1959) their identities by engaging in religious and social practices that draw attention to the characteristics of the group, and to the sacred qualities inherent in the group itself. Thus a series of ritual practices are structured and carried out at regular intervals to give the group its cohesiveness. The descriptions which follow support the theory set out above.

The Sri-Sri-Radha-Radhanath Temple of Understanding is the name given to the Hare Krishna temple and is described by many as an architectural masterpiece which was built according to a Sanskrit geometric formula (ISKCON publication, no author, 1985:3). This multi-storeyed edifice is at once a breath of fresh air and a conspicuous construction in the rather drab surrounds of the township of Chatsworth[17], honouring Krishna as supreme Lord of the world. Although the temple was designed for this particular location, the devotion to Krishna is a transplant of an idea born in India with the formation of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, known by its acronym, ISKCON, or simply as the Hare Krishna Movement. The movement travelled to America in 1966 (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:78), and was later exported to South Africa by its founder, Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada. During the Swami's visit to South Africa in 1975, it was ordained that a branch should be established for the community of Chatsworth (Sooklal 1986). The architecture of the temple is a blend of features from East and West, and seeks to link the past with the present to influence the future (Oxley 1992:122) which is evident in the elements of the temple such as the moat which symbolises the rites of passage of birth, death and reincarnation. But unlike earlier temples whose architecture was purely symbolic to suit the ritualistic practices of Bhakti worship in which specific shrines were built to house the deities, this temple, while it incorporates the symbolic aspects of ritual in the structure, also provides a practical space that serves the social and congregational needs of the devotees (Mikula *et al*. 1982:5).

From the outside, the three ornate hexagonal towers, reminiscent of the North Indian *Nagara* style, which typically "accents the vertical line" (Mikula *et al*. 1982:7), draws the eye upward in a heavenly direction, thus creating a break in the unending repetition and homogeneity created by the council

tenements of Chatsworth. The temple stands on a small hill, facing the east so that it is silhouetted against the westerly sky fitting the classic prescription of the positioning of temples (ibid.:11)[18]. It is encircled by a moat symbolising the unending movement of life, death, and reincarnation. As one enters the temple, from the upper level, by crossing a bridge, one leaves behind one's shoes and the secular world and enters a spiritual place. The sanctum sanctorum is a marble-floored octagonal hall with gilded mouldings and sparkling frescoes, filled with light and the aroma of incense. The ceilings depict larger-than-life pictures of Krishna, accompanied by cows and *gopis*, or milkmaids, painted in the style of Da Vinci or Vermeer, held in gilt-edged frames. Playful yet otherworldly, the temple appears to be worthy of the god it represents, appealing to believers and non-believers alike.

Inside the temple precinct devotees seek to free themselves from the cycle of rebirth in the next life. Called *sannyasins*, they are the equivalent of coenobitic monks. They wear saffron robes and are distinguished by their shaved heads and small tufts of hair, or *sikhas*. Other men are dressed in dhotis and *kurta* tops. The women wear saris made of functional cotton or crepe silk. Their hair is long, black, pulled away from their faces and screwed into a bun. The anointing of *tilak* on their foreheads with clay obtained from the Ganges River (note the connection to a sacred river in the motherland) is a sign of their total surrender to their guru, and the chanting beads held in small bags created for that purpose, are the ubiquitous diacritical markings among these devotees. They pronounce the word chant as in ant and not aunt, having had the accent rub off from their American predecessors. As part of the predominantly Hindi accents heard at the temple, reflecting the liturgical language of the prayers and chants of the movement, one can hear the over-use of the aitch sound in words such as crehation instead of creation. My own name was pronounced brimah with the added aitch at the end instead of brima. But there are other devotees at the temple who come from all over the world, their varied accents reflecting the global diversity of the group in Chatsworth – something I didn't find among the other Hindu religious groups in Durban.

In private meditation and public worship devotees chant the *Maha Manthra* or Great Mantra, said to produce transcendental vibrations which revive the spirit and sustains them in their faith: *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*. This mantra captured the imaginations of George Harrison and John Lennon, too, when in the 1960s, musical vibrations were made of this chant with an escalating tempo that made it as popular as it was catchy. For the adherents of this movement, there are other mantras too, which take the form of four principles repeated to me by a participant without catching her breath:

No meat eating. No illicit sex. No gambling. No intoxication. [19]

These four principles were formulated to address the permissive values of the counterculture movement in the United States where Swami Prabhupada recruited his first followers in the1960s (Stillson 1974).

The protest of the hippies of the counterculture movement was directed against American individualism and competition, but the negative side of this movement created a vacuum in their lives; instead of feeling a part of community, they were alienated and suffered from the effects of drug use. While their new religion and the charisma of Swami Prabhupada appealed to the young hippies because it allowed them to keep some of their previous values, it demanded a radical break with their former ways of life. The movement instituted absolute authority and very strict discipline in their work and sexual life, including the negative commandments of no sex and no intoxication. These regulative principles were transplanted to Durban, and continue to be the mandate for the adherents of Krishna living in Durban.

In Durban, the prohibition is not only against drugs but, as pointed out by the participants, alcohol, tea and coffee as well. These principles restrict social intercourse; the participants who are members of this movement and who participated in this study say that it is very difficult to accept invitations to parties and other social functions from extended family and friends who do not adhere to the principles by which they as devotees live. Similarly, eating out is not an option as there are really no restaurants that prepare food according to their dietary prescriptions.

Food, however, is central to the Hare Krishnas. Their feeding programmes, evidenced by the long rows of people standing daily at parks in and around the city, reflect their belief that man's consciousness can be changed through food cooked with the consciousness of and devotion for Krishna. It was evident from my data that the food of the Hare Krishnas often drew people of various persuasions, initially for its culinary fare and then ultimately to its philosophy, making converts out of them. While food provides a way of physically and spiritually nourishing people, it is cooked with specific prescriptions; without garlic and onion and other alliums, without injury to animals, and only in pure clarified butter, or *ghee* (note the by-product of the cow used to make food pure). The recipes were established by the founder of the movement. Their public restaurant, *Govindas* (named after the other name of Krishna),which is situated below the level of the temple, offers a veritable feast of vegetables, *dhal*, rice, *rotis* and *puris*, *kachoris* and *koftas*, *varas* and *vedas*, and a sweet

climax for the palate, *sooji*, *goolab jamuns*, *ludoos* and *burfees.* It is food fit for the gods! Only devotees of the highest spiritual calibre are trained to cook in the two kitchens available at the temple, say the participants who are attached to this movement. One of the kitchens is reserved for, and dedicated to, the preparation of food offered to the Supreme God which, when consecrated, becomes *prasad*, and is shared among all who attend the service. The other kitchen is for the preparation of food for mere mortals, nevertheless still at the hands of higher-order devotees. There is a strong hierarchical organisation in the set up of the kitchen.

The days of those devoted to service begin before sunrise with cleansing of the body, chanting, and meditation. The rituals of devotional life include the cleaning of the temple, the dressing of the deities and the stitching of their garments, the cooking and the washing, the running of the bookshop and publicity matters, the preparation of the offering trays, and polishing of the brass and other ritual vessels, and the threading of the unending strands of fresh flower Krishna garlands to decorate the shrine holding the deity. Added to this is the strong proselytising activity of the devotees of chanting and dancing in the streets of Durban and through the sale of their religious material.

Although it was clear from the Hindu participants in this study that the cow is not to be consumed, the emphasis placed on this animal by the Hare Krishna devotees, their veneration of this animal, and the dozens of books and other literature about the cow, makes the point about this particular animal more forceful as India's great symbol of motherhood which is transplanted to the Durban diaspora of Hindus. The products of the cow, milk, ghee/butter, sour milk/curd or yoghurt, cow dung, and urine, are important requisites for all ritualistic ceremonies performed according to the Vedic directions (ISKCON Booklet, no author: n.d:2). Purity and pollution concepts are further argued in the paradox that "an impure place or an impure thing becomes purified by the touch of cow dung" (ibid.:3). This may appear contradictory to the uninitiated but to the believers of this movement, these elements are accepted without question as fundamental tenets of their sacred narratives.

Hindu Cultic Life and Institutions

There are numerous forms of cultic life and practices that surround the variety and diversity of religious actions among the Hindus in Durban. While Hinduism resists generalisation, some common features or themes found among the Hindus in Durban may be broadly placed under the categories

of rituals for ancestors, life-cycle rituals, the honouring of deities with *puja*, festivals, and calendars. Each of these themes will be discussed below as they are practiced in the home and in the temple by the observant Hindu.

Rituals for ancestors

Rituals for the dead, or the *Sraddha* rites, begin for the dead at the end of the cremation. According to the *Grhyasutras*, (a text that deals with the domestic lives of people and their duties to be performed from birth to death) the rites for the dead should last for a year but twelve days seems to be a common pattern adopted, symbolic of a year (Courtright 1987:476). The repeat performances of the *Sraddha* continue every year in the period set aside for honouring ancestors. For the south Indian Hindus it is the observance of *Parattassi*, and for the north Indian Hindus, *Pitar Paksh*.

Life-cycle rituals

Life-cycle rituals or rites of passage are called *samskaras*. The word comes from the Sanskrit which means "making perfect" or "refining". A *samskara*, therefore, is a ceremony of refinement, that is to say, the "refining or raising" of an individual beyond his or her mere physical existence and the marking and noting of a higher spiritual purpose (Dasa 2007; Courtright 1987:477). There are traditionally twelve *samskaras* but some Hindu traditions such as the Arya Samaj perform sixteen (Kumar 2003:133). There are, however, eight *samskaras* that are practiced regularly and they are: pre-birth ceremony (the equivalent of the modern-day baby shower including Hindu rituals for the well-being of mother and child), name giving ceremony, first grain ceremony, first hair-cutting, the beginning of school, the thread ceremony (the coming of age ceremony traditionally for Brahmin boys), marriage, and death. These *samskaras* tie in with the four *asramas* or four stages of life as they are chronologically represented: the first stage is *brahmacharya*, pre-marital youth and studentship; the second is that of the householder, *grihasta*; the third phase of life requires one to go into retirement for spiritual pursuits, *vanaprastha*; and finally, the total renunciation and complete withdrawal from all social obligations, or *sannyasa*. Most Hindus never go beyond the householder stage and in many ways it is the most important of the four stages since it supports the other three stages and is the anchor of society (Hiltebeitel 1987:344).

The life-cycle rituals and the four stages of life have their genesis in the home as it is the centre of religious practices for Hindus. If a man is not a householder, it is difficult or impossible to fulfil his

life-cycle rituals. This naturally requires that he should be married because calendar and life-cycle rituals must be kept jointly by spouses. In addition, it is only as a householder that the man is able to fulfil obligations to ancestors (Harrell 1987:407). Thus the home plays a central role in the life of a Hindu since it is the place where the most important life-cycle rituals of birth, marriage and death take place.

Honouring deities with puja

The ritual offerings to honour deities, of food, worship, devotion, recitation of mantras, and "gestures of respect", is called *puja* (Courtright 1987:478). The word *puja* is derived from the Sanskrit root meaning "honour" or "worship" (Ibid.).

From ancient times, Hinduism has had two pre-eminent ways of approaching divinity in ritual: one, through the *yajna*, which conveys offerings to a distant god by consigning them to an intermediary fire, and two, through *puja*, which extends offerings to a present divinity by placing them before or applying them to the god's symbol or image (Falk 1987:83).

As the fundamental cult form, *puja* usually begins in the house with immediate family members, and is taken up more elaborately in the temple where a greater number of people gather. Most Hindus who participated in this study maintain a small shrine in their homes where the chosen deity or deities of the particular household are revered and where the *puja* is performed. A small room in the house is usually reserved for this purpose and where this is not available a small altar is set up in a quiet corner of a room like the lounge. There is usually a small table bearing framed images of deities, a vessel holding water, the *kamakshi velukku,* light of the goddess *Kamakshi*, or the "god lamp" as it is referred to by Tamil-speaking Hindus (Kumar 2000:49), flowers, and incense. Most Hindi-speaking Hindus have a small shrine constructed in the garden.

Apart from the shrine, the body of the worshipper is considered to be a temple housing the divine. The body is to be kept clean, hence daily baths are the part of the Hindu toilet. Cleansing also takes place internally by fasting either through complete or partial abstention (usually fruit only). Similarly, daily cleaning of the house is very essential for the maintenance of a clean house. Shoes are kept in a particular place. In some homes shoes are left at the door. In temples, an area is set aside for shoes to be taken off before entering the place of worship. A clean body, both internally and externally, and a clean space, both at home and in the temple, are pre-requisites for the performance of *puja*.

There are sixteen traditional *upacaras* or "attendances" which an ambitious householder may incorporate into her *puja*, and these form the core of traditional temple services (Falk 1987:84). These attendances may be seen as a common thread in the rituals among the different Hindu groups in Durban, whether in domestic or temple worship. Although the basic pattern in the ritual sequence of a *puja* is well rehearsed by some of the participants in this study, the details are explained here.

At the commencement of a *puja*, the god is invited to participate in the ceremony through an invocation. The god is offered a seat and is then greeted by the worshipper who asks if his journey had gone well. This is followed by a symbolic washing of the god's feet or *padya puja.*[20]
The worshipper then extends water to the god to cleanse its face. Water is offered as a drink after which water and a honey drink is offered. Water is again proffered for further ablutions or *abisekha*, and where the deity is small, the image may literally be bathed and then towel dried. After bathing, the god who is dressed in clothes, or symbolically wrapped in cloth, is applied with perfumes and ointments. Flowers are then placed before the god or draped as garlands on it. Incense is burned and then a *dipa* or burning lamp is turned around the image. The worshipper and family bow or prostrate themselves before the image to offer homage. The god is finally dismissed (ibid.).

Festivals

Hindu festivals in Durban are based on calendars used in India, and coincide with festivals as they are celebrated in the motherland. Kumar (2000:59) points to an important factor in the making of calendars, that is, they are based on the solar cycle as it happens in India. Hindus in Durban follow the patterns of the sun's movement into the northern hemisphere and the seasons as they occur in India, thereby observing the festival dates as they would be in India. This makes an interesting point about the Hindus in Durban; that they want to not only maintain some of the practices started by their ancestors in India, but also to continue with the lineage by linking their festivals and the times they are celebrated to their place of origin. Hence the emphasis is not on the correct time of the observance, but on the correct practice.

In Durban, which festivals are observed is shaped to some degree by the different language groups of Hindus, and the different Hindu groups and movements. The major festivals and religious celebrations that emerged from my data reflect that each deity or religious observance has its own month, accompanied by the changing seasons. There are major festivals and minor ones and there

are religious days as well as religious nights that mark a particular deity or religious event. Birthdays of deities, and victories and triumphs of the gods over evil or demonic forces, are noted in calendars and celebrated.

I have listed the festivals here to line up with the Gregorian calendar. Whether solemn or convivial, what these festivals and ceremonies show is that there are many gods and goddesses; that ancestors are important; that some days or months are auspicious and others not; and that feasting is often preceded by fasting before the celebration of a festival.

The religious year begins with *Thai Pongol* in January. This is a harvest festival associated with the agrarian economy of India. The festival has continued in Durban and is a time of joy, happiness and renewal. Then there are *Kavadi* festivals: *Thaipoosam Kavadi* in the Tamil month of *Thai*, January-February, and the second *Kavadi* or *Chitraparvam Kavadi* in the Tamil month of *Chitray*, April-May. These festivals are held in honour of Muruga, Shiva's son, who is believed to have great powers to heal and to dispel misfortune (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:42). The *kavadis* or decorated frames are carried by the devotees, usually to honour a vow made. This is a popular festival among south Indian Hindus in Durban.

Somewhere between February and March is *Shivarathri*. This festival takes the form of a fast and all-night prayer vigil honouring Shiva on the thirteenth or sometimes fourteenth lunar day in the dark fortnight of the waning moon. *Holika Dahan* during February-March recounts the story of Holika, a demoness in Hindu mythology, who was burnt to death with the help of the god Vishnu. *Holika Dahan* is a joyous festival celebrating the victory of good over evil. During the months of April and May, *Ramanavami* or the birth of Rama, hero of the epic Ramayana, is commemorated. The month of *Adi* between July and August is a period of inauspiciousness, where no important matters are transacted. During the "nine nights" festival or *Navaratri,* in September-October, Hindus honour mother god in her various manifestations as Durga, Lakshmi, and Sarasvati.

The period between August and November brings in the following celebrations and observations: *Krishna Asthmee*, the birth of Krishna; *Ganesh Sadurti*, the birth of Ganesha; and *Pitar Paksh*, a period of fasts and prayers offered in remembrance of dead ancestors and which is performed mainly among Hindi-speaking Hindus. When the moon is completely overshadowed by the sun and when the sun enters *Kanya*, September to October, then Tamil-speaking Hindus observe *Parattassi* for a whole month, during which rituals of food are offered to the dead. Complete vegetarianism is

observed during this time. A set of pots, pans, flatware, crockery and kitchen cloths are brought out, which are reserved and used only for this particular ritual observance.

The festivals culminate in the national celebration of *Divali*, which literally means a row of lights. This festival celebrates triumphs and unions such as the return of Rama and Sita to Ayodhya after banishment; the marriage of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, to Vishnu; and Krishna's destruction of the demon Narakasura. The essence of this festival is the celebration of the triumph of light over darkness. However, Hindus, depending on their linguistic background, will select any one of these mythological reasons to celebrate *Diwali*, as the festival is commonly referred to in Durban. This is an extremely auspicious time and it is celebrated with much enthusiasm.

Other festivals include *Katha*, which may be undertaken at any time of the year that is appropriate. It is the recitation of the sacred narrative about the Lord Satyanarayana, and is closely connected to the festival of *Jhanda*. This ceremony literally means flag. The flag is attached to long bamboo pole. These *jhandas* are very visible on the front lawns of many Hindu homes in Durban. The *jhanda* represents Hanuman, the monkey god, who is associated with the worship of Rama.

Food is a major part of festivals. Almost every festival has specific foods that would be present on these occasions apart from the regular items that feature on the offering tray consisting of milk and fruit. At the festival celebrating the birth of Ganesha, for example, *ludoo*, a confection, is offered to the birthday god as is prescribed in the Puranas.[21] At *Diwali* there is a cornucopia of food in the form of confection, baked goods, and savouries, going beyond the daily culinary fare in proportion and scope. Food at these festivals may be viewed as culinary mementos that are made and remade every year and every participant knows which foods are associated with which festival in an automatic way.

However, festivals repeat themselves year after year by their unchanging eternal return but the contexts in which they are reproduced and re-enacted seem to change. The festivals which are repeated as calendar times are out of sync with the everyday time. During festivals normal time and normal work ceases, to accommodate excessive eating or complete abstinence. Nevertheless, daily matters can intrude and this can change the way festivals are observed. Every day matters such as health, finances, and time, become practical considerations in the production and re-enactment of festivals. A participant, Vimala Devan, for example, is aware of the demands of the festival of *Diwali* in terms of the vast quantities of food and the desired balance to be created between sweet and

savoury, and the giving of food gifts to family, friends and neighbours, which not only become expensive and labour intensive to produce but, as festival foods, are rich in butter, sugar and other ingredients which place strain on the body, especially if one is diabetic, like her husband. Vimala also raises a practical consideration about the fact that these festival foods are usually distributed to those who may be themselves preparing such food and it may, therefore, be more sensible to give away its value in money to charity.[22]

There are other considerations too and they include, among others, that festivals and religious occasions among Hindus require the preparation of specific foods, often for a weekday ritual, which appear to be very time consuming. Arjun Kallichuran, who is a very pious Hindu who tries to observe most of the calendar festivals told me that he and his wife hold full-time employment and it is very difficult for his wife to come home and prepare the requisite food for offering (referring to the confection) at the temple that same evening. What they have resorted to is buying in the confection from a reputable local confectioner who, from a Hindu perspective, will supply worshippers with their specific requirements and who will, they know with confidence, only prepare the confection with pure butter or *ghee*. While this takes away the pressure of having to make the confection from scratch, and gives the *halwai* merchants good business, the emotional association of food with the familial mothers and grandmothers and the recipes handed to their daughters, is missing. More Hindu women have entered the work force in Durban and expectations of a woman's role in the Hindu home are beginning to shift and there have been signs of men sharing the cooking with their wives, helping with the shopping, and general housekeeping. There are still some men who remain resistant.[23]

The purchasing of food for convenience is a good example of the changing attitudes to food and ritual in contemporary Durban and the dissonance between the need for the exact reproduction and continuity of festivals and other important calendar customs, and the demands and pressures of everyday life.

Calendars

The calendar custom is central to the Hindus in Durban. The "body of observances repeated from year to year on a given date in a given place, constitutes a specific form of...collective memory" and identity (Noyes and Abrahams 1999:79). Calendar customs are therefore "powerful sensory experiences" that become common as they are shared by the religious community to form a

"bounded group of people connected over time to a bounded place" (ibid.) with a common historical identification.

The Hindu calendar is called *Pancanga* ("five limbs") which structures the year based on lunar and solar systems of calculation (Courtright 1987:480). The unit of a day is the basis for the building of a lunar month and is measured between sunrise and sunset. There are thirty lunar days in a month and they begin in sequence starting from the new and full moon. The month is split into two parts: the first two weeks of the month when the moon is waxing, or *amavasya,* and the last two weeks of the month when the moon is waning, or *purnima*. The waxing phase of the moon is considered an auspicious period conducive to growth and prosperity, and Hindus would generally favour this period to hold weddings, move into new homes, open new businesses, etcetera. Most religious festivals are held during this auspicious time, however, there are exceptions. The waning phase of the moon is associated with "danger and inauspiciousness and often calls for more cautious behaviour" and worshippers generally practise self-discipline through forms of abstinence (ibid.:481). Rituals to ancestors are generally conducted during such a period. These broad divisions of the month are the basis for how Hindus structure and plan their cultic and personal lives.

All the Hindus interviewed in this study have indicated the importance of having a calendar in their homes which reflects the festivals, prayer dates, and the periods of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. Where interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants, a calendar was often offered or presented when I got to the part of the interview that raised the subject of festivals and calendars. The calendar plays an important role, not only because it is around it that their cultic lives are ordered and arranged, but because the entire social milieu of observant Hindus is constructed around it.

Identity and Community

Religious requirements lead to economic consequences because specific foods, spices, kitchen aids, religious accoutrements associated with worship, clothes, jewellery, books, and newspapers, are tied in to a specific economy. A large part of the identity of the Hindus in Durban is created through consumption; the rules of purity and pollution require specific types of clothing and vestments to be worn for specific occasions, and these need speciality shops that stock such items of dress; foods are prepared in a way that require specific ingredients, spices, herbs, pulses, and the necessary kitchen equipment to make prescribed foods; worship at home and temple also requires religious objects

that have to be sourced at an appropriate shop. Thus, commercial enclaves have emerged wherever there are large residential concentrations of Indians in Durban which, at the core of their businesses, sell items and services relevant to their Indian consumers.

The Unit 3 Market in Chatsworth, Durban, also called the Bangladesh Market, is one such ethnic enclave catering to the needs of the Indians and the Hindus who live in the greater area. I had lived in Durban for many years and had not been to this market; because it was referred to often by participants who frequently shopped there, especially for fresh produce and other consumables, I decided that I would make a trip to this market.

As mentioned by many participants, the market is, indeed, a haven for those seeking a good selection of fresh fruit and vegetables, and there is probably an art in negotiating one's way around it. For everywhere, enthusiastic sellers called out the prices of carrots and cabbages against the background of other blaring voices. Double beans (lima), *gadra* beans (borlotti), small, potent bird's eye chillies, baby brinjals, loofah, jackfruit, green and red *bhaji*,[24] lady fingers and bitter gourd, are placed alongside the more familiar beetroot and butternut. I could hear people speaking Tamil, Hindi, and English, and some English mixed with Tamil, creating a whole new language. Women dressed in puckered saris, wearing them, for practical reasons, higher off the ground than is considered proper[25] and protective aprons, weighed and tipped their vegetables into the baskets of shoppers, with effortless alacrity. Flower sellers, continuing the occupation of their ancestors, (Vahed:1999) in small stalls, who displayed their stiff triangular arrangements of chrysanthemums and carnations on shelves, sat making garlands while customers enquired about prices. Spices were sold here, too, in large plastic bowls attractively piled in little mounds bearing name pegs with descriptions such as, "mother-in-law's masala," and "Durban Hot". It made me sneeze. Prayer goods like camphor and incense mingled with the scent of papaya and mango. Other stalls held anxious chickens in cages for sale, cheap toys, colourful crockery, pots and pans of shiny aluminium, cast iron *thavas* on which *rotis* are cooked, and dozens of Chinese manufactured goods.

While many Hindus who participated in this study will eat out on occasion, there are some others who, because of the restrictions placed on their dietary requirements, will not eat in restaurants. For example, very strict vegetarians have difficulty finding a suitable place to eat. This, they say, often puts a strain on social relationships.

Although Hindus in Durban have expanded their culinary repertoire to include other tastes and cuisines, curry and rice or *rotis* remain a favourite staple. There are dozens of eating places in Durban that prepare food which suit the Hindu palate, but for the discerning, as this participant says:

> Go and eat in *Palki,* and go and eat in *Indian Summer,* and you eat pukka Indian food. There is proper Indian food.[26]

The bunny chow, was raised a few times as an item of food consumed by some of the participants in this study and has become synonymous with Indians in Durban. They are easily made and available almost everywhere in the city. A measurement of bread from a common or garden loaf, or shop bread as Indians call it, is taken, from which a substantial sum of bread is carefully removed without puncturing the walls of the crust, so as to create a concave vessel, which is then stuffed with a filling of curried beans, mutton or chicken. The soft centre which was removed is then placed on top forming a lid. It is a rather messy affair which oozes gravy and there is an art to eating this local delight using fingers to negotiate one's way between morsels of filling and pieces of bread broken off – something that comes so easily to those adept at eating with their hands. It can be shared or eaten alone, depending on its size, and it is best eaten where you can clean your fingers afterwards. I have seen Indians eat a bunny on a plate in restaurants, picnic style on a rug on the grass, or standing around a car parked on the patch of lawn at the northern beaches of Durban, using its bonnet as a table off which the bunny is eaten. It has become common fare in Durban and it even gets a mention in *The Encyclopedia of Indian Diaspora* as a culinary contribution by Indians in South Africa (Reeves 2006:111).

Conclusion

It is clear that new solidarities amongst Hindus have emerged between older forms of beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and the neo-Hindu movements on the other. These solidarities continue to develop as they are constantly re-created through the neo-Hindu movements. What was noted was that while Hindus have reconstructed their religious identities, the cow remains inviolable, and the great legends of banishment celebrated in festivals such as *Diwali,* remain unaltered, thus preserving their connection with the homeland; India remains central in this vision, and their ideas of India are refreshed in different ways through Indian cuisine, visits to India, dress, and common culture and heritage.

The next section on the background of the Jews will consider the processes surrounding the reproduction and reconstruction of community to show how Jewish identities emerged and were formed in Durban.

The Jews

Introduction

This section of the chapter will show how a people with deeply conservative and traditional religious practices were pushed by poverty and oppression to leave their homeland in present day Lithuania and come to South Africa. They brought with them their religious orthodoxy in the form of beliefs and practices; indeed, once they had settled, they put great pressure on more liberal English and German Jews already established in South Africa to adopt a more rigorous Judaism. What this section shows is how a group of people who have been given encouragement to set up their own practices have reproduced and reconstructed their identity in Durban.

How Jews got to Durban

How the Jews got to Durban is part of a bigger history of how the Eastern Europeans came to South Africa, entering through the port of Cape Town. Most Jews in this study know where their ancestors came from, such as this participant:

> You saw *Fiddler on the Roof* [referring to film]. Now most of your South Africa Jews are descended from that area, Ashkenazi, and the villages in Eastern Europe. Cairo, Persia, and Morocco were all very observant communities, and particularly Eastern Europe. It was just a way of life. And they brought that way of life here.[27]

Mendel Kaplan (1986:9-10) in recounting how the Jews got to South Africa, sees three distinct streams of Jewish migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first movement into the country began in 1806 and became significant during the 1830s, continuing to about 1880. During this wave some four thousand Jews arrived, mainly from Britain and Germany. The majority of Jewish immigrants, approximately 40 000, who arrived between 1880 and 1920, were refugees from Russia. They came from provinces within the Pale of Settlement,[28] situated in territories belonging to subjugated minority populations, such as Poles, Byelo-Russians, and Lithuanians (Gershater1955:84).

Between 1933 and 1938 more refugees would arrive in South Africa, fleeing the tyranny of Nazi Germany (Kaplan 1986:10). When the Jews arrived in South Africa there were no restrictions on their movements or places of residence or on where they could do business; they had the vote, and generally prospered in South Africa.

At least 70 per cent of all Eastern European immigrants to South Africa came from the region that is today called Lithuania, which consisted of the pre-1917 Czarist Russian provinces of Kovna, Vilna, Grodno, and Northern Suvalki, all of which had a largely Lithuanian-Polish character, and Vitebsk, Minsk, and Magilev, with an essentially Byelorussian-Russian make-up. These Jews are commonly known as Litvaks (Cohen 1984:3).

Large numbers of Jews in Lithuania lived wretched lives. Periodic pogroms and deportations, long periods of military service in the Tsar's army, and natural disasters – floods, droughts, and fires which sometimes destroyed whole villages – were frequently matched by desperate economic poverty. One eyewitness account of Jewish life in a Lithuanian village in 1858 speaks of several families living in one small room, and families who only ate in the evenings when the breadwinner arrived home with a little money. Despite their poverty, these Jews had a great regard for knowledge and learning – and still do. The political and social repression and economic hardship they experienced in Lithuania made them rely for spiritual sustenance on their synagogues, rabbis, Talmudic colleges and, importantly, the *Torah*; large numbers of the Lithuanian Jews were well versed in its intricacies and able to read it in the original Hebrew. The local Lithuanian peasantry, on the other hand, were almost universally illiterate (Gershater 1955:64).

Considering the repression they lived under, large numbers of Jews saw no future for themselves in Lithuania and emigrated, mainly to the United States of America, but also to South Africa and other countries where Jews have settled. Some chose South Africa because of long delays in England before gaining admission to the United States (Cohen 1984:3). But perhaps the majority chose South Africa because of Samuel Marks, seen in the Jewish community as a pioneer of immigration to the country. He achieved great success in South Africa and regularly wrote back to Lithuania with news of his progress. The news got around the tightly-knit Jewish community there that South Africa was a land of opportunity. This was reinforced by other favourable and even enthusiastic reports about the country (Saron1955:69).

Once the decision had been taken to leave, the emigrants not only had to take leave from relatives and friends, but from their ancestors too. Accompanied by a mother or wife, the male emigrant would visit the local graveyard and seek out the graves of important members of his family. He would pause at each of these graves to allow the woman to offer supplications to the ancestors for success. He would also visit the rabbi for his blessing, and in the synagogue on the Sabbath would read the Law before a prayer was said for a safe journey. On the day of departure the entire community would gather to watch the emigrants load up a cart and leave the town or village.

The journey itself was an enormous undertaking for people who had probably never travelled more than a few miles from their villages. The train and boat journeys were in most cases the first they had ever experienced. The first part of the sea voyage, to England, was often in cargo boats. The comfort of the passengers was not taken into consideration, and no hot meals were served. Herring, potatoes, and a little Russian tea were the staple provisions.

Once the number of Jewish passengers travelling to Cape Town on the final leg of their journey became sufficient, the shipping lines began to provide a small amount of kosher food. However, there was often not enough of this food to last the full voyage, and for the Lithuanian Jews, who came from such a deeply orthodox background, this caused a great deal of unhappiness as there could be no question of them deviating from their dietary laws. However, there were instances where the passengers were treated better. In one instance the captain of the *Warwick Castle* allowed his Jewish passengers to kill as many sheep, “according to Jewish practices”, as they required during the voyage (ibid.:79-84).

Jews began to arrive in Natal in 1880, via the Cape, arriving at much the same time as the Indians. Being Jews of Lithuanian stock they were, it seems, more homogenous in speech and culture than the Indians, even if divided into Orthodox and Reformed traditions. They merged with the other European settlers, associating themselves with the privileged and politically empowered. However, the extent of their assimilation is limited because they keep their religious and cultural identities apart. As I will show later, their specific dietary requirements and religious practices restrict their ability to socialise and mix easily with others, even with other people of European descent.

The Jewish emigration to South Africa largely coincided with events which led to South Africa’s economic development, and as a result Jews have participated in virtually every segment of South Africa’s economy almost from the time they arrived in the country. This economic development

gained momentum with the opening up of the interior after 1936 as a result of the Great Trek, and later, the development of mining following the discovery of diamonds and then gold. Jews were not initially directly involved in mining to any great extent, but quickly became involved in the growth of commerce which resulted from the exploitation of these discoveries (Kaplan 1986:9).

A second factor which aided Jewish integration into the economy, especially in a new city like Johannesburg, was that there was no existing establishment trying to keep newcomers out – everyone started *de novo*, the Jews included. As a result, Jews have been well integrated into Johannesburg society from the outset; in other parts of the world Jews generally arrived in established cities and were frequently, initially, treated as outsiders (Kaplan 1986:29).

Many of the Jewish immigrants, knowing of no other way to make a living, began life in South Africa as salesmen, often travelling from town to town with packs on their backs as peddlers or, to use the Afrikaans word, as *smouse*. Later, they set up shops, often in a run-down part of a town or city, but as often as not without the intention that their children should take over the business: instead, every penny was saved to give the children a good education so that they could go on to become professionals – doctors, lawyers, accountants, scientists. This kind of education, and such job opportunities, had been denied the parents in Russia (Kaplan 1986:27).

When Jews in Natal began institutionalising their practices, they experienced certain problems because of their small numbers. There was some difficulty in achieving a *minyan*, which is the quorum of ten men needed before a religious service can be conducted. They also struggled to find a qualified person to educate Jewish children in their faith. In 1882 the Jewish community secured for themselves a burial ground, and in 1890 the first Jewish congregation was started with the opening of the St. Andrew's Street Synagogue in the Durban city centre (Abelson 1955:337). This was the beginning of the community of Jews in the growing economic hub of Durban.

In 1898 a new wing of the synagogue was consecrated and set aside as a school where the children would receive instruction in their faith. The service was attended by the Governor of Natal, Sir Charles Mitchell, and other government officials. The governor gave a speech in which he welcomed the educational effort the school represented and made it clear that the Jews were seen as an integral part of Durban's white community, saying the school would prepare the children to "ennoble by their life work the community of which they form so important a part" (ibid.).

The Boer War, which started in 1899, resulted in Jewish refugees from the Orange Free State and South African Republic (later the Transvaal) fleeing to Natal. To cope with this sudden influx, organisations which went on to become major Jewish institutions were first established. The new arrivals revitalised the religious life of Durban's Jewish community to such an extent that, instead of sometimes struggling to form a *minyan*, services were often crowded (ibid.:344).

Succeeding Mitchell as governor of Natal was Sir Matthew Nathan, the first Jew to head a British colony. The son of a successful London merchant, Nathan proved to be an effective governor, and many of his policies were maintained long after he had left office. Believing that the "Asiatic problem" could be dealt with by ending Indian immigration to the colony, he ensured that the last shipload of indentured Indians arrived during his term as governor (ibid.:346).

After the end of the Boer War an economic depression gripped many parts of South Africa, but despite this Durban's Jewish community grew to 1500 (ibid.:347).

Throughout the nineteenth century Jews enjoyed full religious and civic equality with other white citizens of the then Cape and Natal colonies where Britain ruled. This was extended to the whole of present-day South Africa after Britain gained control of the two Boer republics after the Boer War. Before the war, in the South African Republic, Jews suffered civic restrictions which disqualified them from government schooling, public office, and membership of the Volksraad, or Parliament. At various times in the decades that followed anti-Jewish sentiments were sometimes publicly expressed, but Jews were never subjected to civic constraints and, in general, prospered. In the 1930s, a few thousand German Jews fleeing Hitler's Germany were allowed into South Africa, but further Jewish immigration was stopped in the late 1930s (Goldmann 1983).

It was not just that the Jews "brought that way of life" to Durban, in the way they practise their religion, but it would appear that they have maintained their historical homogeneity as a people as well, says Caleb Rosenthal:

> Certainly we regard ourselves as a single people with a single history whether it's from Yemen or Iraq or Lithuania, you are all part of a single history.[29]

The Jews in Durban are divided mainly into the Orthodox and Reform traditions. Although there are some doctrinal differences and different emphasis between the groups on various aspects of

Judaism, they all appear to be absorbed in the twin precepts of beliefs and practices and the exclusion of the pig is a common denominator. These beliefs and practices relate to certain fundamental ideas about god, revelation, and man, and they are expressed through ceremonies, rituals, and laws or *mitzvot*, to cultivate people's spirituality, and to define the relationship between the individual and God and the individual and fellow individuals (Goldberg and Rayner 1989:316).

The Jewish population peaked at one hundred thousand in South Africa. Their numbers have dropped over the past two decades primarily as a result of emigration. This loss has been partly compensated for by the arrival of roughly 6000 immigrants from Israel (Hellig 1995:156). Jocelyn Hellig (ibid.) argues that Jews in South Africa are regarded as the "...most organised diaspora community in the world" who have been able to maintain one of the most basic features of orthodoxy, namely separateness. There were approximately 2500 – 3000 Jews in Durban at the time of Hellig writing but according to the Jewish participants in this study, there are now fewer than 2000 Jews in Durban.

Despite widespread anxiety about crime rates, and fears for the future, the Jewish community currently experiences relative tranquillity and prosperity. A highly acculturated, socially homogenous, essentially middle-class community, it enjoys a large measure of acceptance within South African society at large. (Mendelsohn 2000:50)

Two important Jewish bodies in South Africa are the Jewish Board of Deputies, and the Zionist Federation, each having branches in Durban. The Board is the representative body dealing with all matters relating to the welfare of Jews in the country, including issues affecting their religious and civic rights. The Federation concerns itself with all aspects of the relationship of South African Jews with Israel, especially in the question of Jewish survival and the State of Israel (Arkin 1984:80).

The Jewish tradition also lays great emphasis on religious education, with an obligation on adherents to both learn and teach. This flows naturally from the Jewish history of being an oppressed minority which needs to pass on its teachings to succeeding generations in order to ensure its survival. Various educational institutions have therefore been developed: the *Talmud torah* for Jewish religious education, the *cheder* for elementary tuition, the *beit ha-midrash* which acts as a "house of study", and the *yeshiva* for higher learning. The synagogue itself is in many respects also a place of learning, not only because it often houses a school but because Jewish forms of worship combine prayer with study (Goldberg and Rayner 1989:316).

Men and women are separated in orthodox synagogues either by means of a partition known as a *nechitzah*, or by seating them in a gallery overlooking the service being conducted below, and the *bimah*, which is the raised platform from which the scripture is read. Women thus play no active role in the service. It is uncertain whether this was the practice in Israel's Temple though it is known that there were separate courts for men and women at that time. The first firm evidence of separation occurring in the synagogue dates from the middle ages (ibid.:323).

After the destruction of the Temple, not only the synagogue, but the Jewish home, too, became primary places of worship. The home becomes a "little sanctuary" where the dining table represents an altar at which the family performs quasi-priestly acts of prayer and other rituals, especially the old Pharisaic practice of lighting candles before the Sabbath. In this way, observant Jews seek to make their homes places where they "practice of the presence of God". Such homes will contain ritual objects, sacred books, and, most prominently, *mezuzahs*, which are attached to the right-hand side of the front door and the living room door following the commandment demanding that God's word be written "on the door posts of your house and on your gates" (ibid.:320).

Defining Jewish religion

Jew is the anglicized form of the Hebrew *yehudi*. It was originally a tribal definition and it meant a member of the tribe of Judah. In 922 BCE Israel was divided into two kingdoms: a northern and a southern kingdom. The northern kingdom comprised all twelve tribes and was called Israel. The southern kingdom comprised only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and included Jerusalem. The northern kingdom was conquered by King Sargon II of the Assyrians in 721 BCE and the kingdom with ten of the tribes of Israel "vanished from history" (Kruger *et al*.2009:153). Judah alone remained to perpetuate the Israelite faith and nationality (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:211). When Babylon was conquered by King Cyrus of Persia, he allowed the Judeans to return to Judah after their exile of nearly 50 years, and they came to be called *yehudi*, Judeans, or Jews, by historians. Those who survived the fall of Jerusalem became so scattered that they could no longer be called the Hebrew nation (Kruger *et al*. 2009:153). The word *yehudi* became synonymous with the "descendants of Abraham" and the word Jew would develop into a common appellation with Judaism deriving from the Latin *Judaeus* to refer to the faith of the Jews (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:211).

Traditionally, argues Alan Unterman (1981:7), Judaism did not see itself as a religion; it was seen as the teachings and commandments consequential to the covenant relationship between God and Israel. In the modern context there is considerable resistance amongst traditional Jews to characterise Judaism as a religion. Jews, he continues, find it belittling of their status to be called a religion in the same vein that Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism are. What Jews want is to see Judaism as "unique" and "in a category of its own as recording the divinely revealed teaching mediated through God's covenant with Israel" (ibid.).

However, is religion about what people believe or what they do? Christianity, for example, focuses on beliefs rather than practices to the extent that its beliefs are enumerated as a creedal statement. Judaism takes a slightly different approach; while it has a system of beliefs these beliefs are expressed through rites and custom, rituals, rites of passage, and the abstention from certain foods. If one takes the "collected facts" of religion like the ones presented by Ninian Smart (1989) as a way of working out the anatomy of religion, then one can argue that Judaism is a religion. Smart (ibid.) has suggested that all religions have these seven dimensions, namely, the practical and ritual, the experiential and emotional, the narrative and mythic, the doctrinal and philosophical, the ethical and legal, the social and institutional, and the material, to which he added the artistic, political and economic dimensions. While the practical and ritual dimensions are the more obvious and observable aspects of Judaism in Durban, through fastidious obedience to the commandments, the doctrinal, mythical, and philosophical facts are less observable to varying degrees within both Reform and Orthodox articulations of the religion.

But as Unterman(1981:8) warns, one should "not impose procrustean religious categories on a religious tradition"; although one can study Judaism as a religion it must be studied in the context of its "particularity" and "uniqueness". What seems to be the case in Judaism is that the dichotomy between the sacred and secular is distinguished in daily and weekly practices through the ordering of time and space: their cultural lives, their historical consciousness, their Jewish identity and their Jewish lives appear to be intrinsically part and parcel of their religious lives. And because practice and belief are so generally enmeshed into their daily lives, Jewish religion may be conceived as a way of life embodying practices and rituals, rather than a religion that is adopted by a group of people which prescribes and proscribes religious behaviour.

Contemporary Judaism is composed of a number of different interpretations that have emerged largely in response to the forces of the Enlightenment (Heilman 1992). The different branches

include Liberal, Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Orthodox interpretations. In Durban, the two main groups of practising Jews, from which the participants in this study were drawn, come from the Orthodox and Reform denominations. While there are some doctrinal differences between the two groups such as in their interpretation of dress, the place of women in the synagogue, what constitutes kindling a fire on the Sabbath, to walk or not to walk to the synagogue on the Sabbath, and the interpretations of *kashrut*, and while this gives the impression of clear divisions between the two groups, the lines blur when it comes to prohibitions; the pig remains an item of food that is not negotiable on Jewish tables.

A Jew, then, may be either considered as someone who holds a religious identity or as someone who is biologically born as a Jew. The question of who is a Jew is usually answered by the participants who say that anyone who is born of a Jewish mother is a Jew[30]. For many Jews there is a boundary marked between themselves and the rest of humanity, or the gentiles, but this boundary may be traversed or blurred when a gentile converts through marriage. In this thesis I use the description Jew to mean anyone who adheres to the beliefs and practices of Judaism and this would include converts to the religion as well.

What Gives Jews in Durban their Jewish Identity?

There are three categories that may be highlighted around which Jewish identity is constructed and observed in Durban: one, dietary laws, two, Sabbath, and three, community and marriage. Each of these categories is examined below.

Dietary laws

One of the clearest identifiers of what a Jew does and who a Jew is, is the prohibition against pork in the culinary practices of the Jew. This exclusion is part of the complex set of dietary laws, or *kashrut,* given as injunctions in Judaism. *Kashrut* refers to the religious practice that is the ostensible foundation of all Jewish culinary practices that allude to the prescribed types of animal for consumption, the separation of milk and meat, and approved methods of ritual slaughter. Foods that conform to the regulation of *kashrut* laws are referred to as *kosher*. The root of the English word “kosher” from the Hebrew *kasher,* means “fit”, “proper”, or “legitimate”. However, the system of food laws that deems what is acceptable and unacceptable for consumption appears to have a deeper meaning for the adherents of Judaism. As Mary Douglas (1989:55) has theorised, the

meaning of the Jewish dietary laws in the context of the laws found in the Book of Deuteronomy relate to “fitness”, and she rhetorically elaborates the idea of holiness as “separation, restriction, and wholeness” – what is “fit” is that which is religiously and culturally set apart.

The Book of Leviticus, the third book of the Hebrew Bible, chapters 11-15, instructs lay people on the rules of uncleanness, and its recommended treatments, which include animals, uncleanness caused by childbirth, diseases, and the purification of the temple, all in the attempt, dominated by the desire, to divide the world into sacred and profane, pure and impure, and to show that a world composed of incongruous elements is threatening to the ideas of community (Eliade 1959). While these chapters in Leviticus are very important in understanding these divisions and are part of the complex rules of purity and pollution among the Israelites, which are associated with holiness generally among the Jews in Durban, it is the restriction that is placed on the pig and other foods that is of concern here in the dietary laws of the Jews.

Leviticus 11:1-47 (Holy Bible:111) begins with a negative command to not eat certain food identified with creatures of earth, water and sky. Characteristics are offered for those animals that are considered clean: they must part the hoof; they must have cloven feet; and they must chew the cud. All three of these features must be present otherwise the animal is considered unclean (Lev 11:4-8). “Do not eat pigs” states verse 7, “they must be considered unclean; they have divided hoofs, but do not chew the cud”.

Also an Israelite is forbidden to touch the dead carcass of any of these creatures. Verses 9-12 state that any water creature with fins and scales may be eaten. A list of sea food considered unclean and inedible follows. For the Jews in Durban, fish that does not have fins and scales is not eaten following these commandments. All other creatures that live in water such as prawns, crayfish, and shrimps are also excluded. Verses 12-19 identify a long list of the species of birds that are detestable and should not be eaten or their carcasses touched. Verse 20 begins a list of detestable insects that are to be avoided, and these include winged insects that go on all fours; however, certain exceptions are given: winged insects that go on all fours with jointed legs above their feet may be eaten and these include the locust, grasshopper and cricket. Other winged insects besides these will make an individual unclean whether by eating or touching a carcass. Verses 20-47 identify those creatures that will render an individual unclean along with practices in the cooking process that result in the ritual impurity of a vessel or an individual. Leviticus 11:43-45 is the gravamen of all the food laws of the Bible which expresses the function of such a complex set of laws. The verses say: “Do not make

yourselves unclean by eating any of these. I am the Lord your God, and you must keep yourselves holy, because I am holy. I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt so that I could be your God. You must be holy, because I am holy".

Apart from the list of forbidden foods, there are rules regarding the precise methods for the slaughter of animals and preparation of food that is prescribed for consumption. The act which renders an animal or bird fit for consumption is called *shehitah* meaning "ritual slaughter" (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:354). Meat that is not prepared for consumption in the manner prescribed is regarded as *terephah* or *traife,* a remnant of Yiddish colloquialism among Jews in Durban. This means that every Jewish household is attached to or has to be close enough to a kosher butchery if the ritually approved meat and fowl is to be consumed.

However, finding kosher meats in Durban can sometimes be a challenge as there is only one kosher butchery. Although the butchery is situated in the heartland of a predominately Jewish area, those who live far away from this shopping centre do find it an inconvenience to obtain kosher meat. What's more is that kosher meats cost a lot more than non-kosher meats because they are sent through from Johannesburg. I spoke to the kosher supervisor of the butchery who worried that only a few members of the Reform tradition buy from the kosher butchery.[31] Perhaps there is an explanation for this as another participant from the Reform movement told me that many Jews buy their kosher meats directly from Johannesburg; the meat is fresher, he says, and they get it at half the price.[32]

Following these extensive commandments regarding what foods may be consumed and what foods may not, and bearing in mind the implications they have for cleanness and holiness and the relationship they have to the God of the Jews, the table of the Jew has become an altar (Borowitz 1987:130). What foods are placed on the table for eating have to be ritually acceptable as kosher.

For the Jews in Durban, food has a particular meaning. The Jewish population in general remains diligent in keeping the prescribed dietary laws and it has become one of the most important ways of expressing Jewish identity. In a place like Durban where there is much cultural diversity, the food habits and unusual methods of procuring foods for consumption, coupled with the extensive infrastructure required both in the home and outside the home, provide Jews with a way to make themselves distinct from others in their observation of Judaism. The enactment of the religious identities of the Jews in Durban requires a high degree of effort to maintain the restrictions through

their practices. Much time is spent selecting the right food for consumption, which sometimes means having bigger financial resources to do so as kosher foods are often much more expensive. While many participants complained that kosher meat and chicken is very expensive, what is interesting is that many of them have found creative solutions to the problem by becoming vegetarian or by eating mainly a diet of fish and vegetables. This not only eases the financial burden but it also assists greatly in overcoming some of the difficulties in the kitchen and problems related to separation and division in the kitchen. This is explained below.

As part of the complex set of dietary rules surrounding the consumption of food associated with Judaism, the mixing of milk and meat is strictly forbidden, arising from the prohibition against seething a kid in its mother's milk. It is therefore "forbidden to cook, eat, or benefit from a mixture of milk and meat" (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:116). Foods that are "neutral" are referred to as *parveh* and may therefore be consumed with either milk or meat items of food. To cope with this injunction, properly regulated arrangements are made in the domestic sphere, particularly the kitchen. There are two sinks or a set up that improvises with two buckets to provide the additional washing up space where space is limited. All utensils, flatware, serving dishes, and cooking pots are separated for the cooking of milk and meat diets and they remain separated even in storage. Even dishcloths are labelled for each culinary purpose and stored accordingly. These appear to be complicated but as one participant explains that it is simple and after prolonged practice of *kashrut*, it becomes easy and "absolutely natural". For example, he explains, when he wants to eat cheese, he gets the "blue plate" and when he is going to eat chicken he gets the "white plate".[33]

How food is stored in a refrigerator is very important for the maintenance of *kashrut*; milk and meat should never be stored in the same space in the refrigerator as accidents can always happen through drips and spills. Great care is taken to avoid such accidents and observant Jews will sometimes have two fridges separating milk and meat.

Those who observe very strict *kashrut* practices find it difficult to eat out. Adding to this is that there are no kosher restaurants in Durban. Those who do eat out will mainly order fish or vegetables. Still, very strict Jews will not even drink a cup of tea in a restaurant. Social interaction between the different groups in Durban is, therefore, virtually non-existent.

Sabbath

The Sabbath festival is central to the lives of the Jews in Durban and remains the most important of festivals because of its weekly repetition and the mandatory nature of its observance, giving Jews their distinct identity.

The Sabbath was ordained by the their biblical God in Exodus 20: “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy”.

Elsewhere the bible speaks of the Jewish god finishing the work of creation on the seventh day, and the rabbinical interpretation of this is that the Sabbath is an intrinsic part of creation, not merely an instance of god pausing to rest or abstaining from work. This has been taken to mean that the day of rest is not simply to be regarded as a time when no work is done, but as a time of “repose and serenity” that has been specifically created by god (Heschel 1963:22). Exodus 31:16-17 declares the Sabbath to be a covenant between god and his chosen people, the Jews[34].

Furthermore, the Sabbath reminds people that god is the creator of the world, because man has been given dominion over that which god created and labours to control that world, but by abstaining from work and seeing that the world does not end when he surrenders that dominion, man must recognise that it is god that created the world (Werblowskyand Wigoder 1966:336).

The Jewish god did not declare anything created in the first six days to be holy; the first declaration of holiness was the declaration that the seventh day was holy, which has been interpreted to mean that the Sabbath is holy above all other things or institutions (Heschel 1963:9).

The Sabbath is defined purely in terms of time: every seventh day is to be observed as the Sabbath. It is not therefore linked to any solar or lunar calendar. In other words, unlike many other religions which denote spaces or things as holy, the holiest Jewish institution, the Sabbath, is not linked in any way to space or to physical objects. Judaism can therefore be seen as “a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time” (Heschel 1963:8).

Jewish scholarship argues that this de-linking of the sacred from space and things was not only given added emphasis during the Jewish exile in Babylon, when the Jews could not build a temple or

worship in public places, but may well have been the reason why they survived as a group at all, summed up in the Jewish saying, “More than that Israel has kept the Sabbath, it is the Sabbath that has kept Israel” (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:337).

In terms of the Gregorian calendar, the Jewish seventh day begins at sunset every Friday and ends at nightfall on Saturday. It begins with the woman of the house lighting candles and saying a prayer at the dining room table. This is followed by the *Kiddush*, a prayer said by the man of the house, to separate the holy time of the Sabbath from the profane time of weekdays. The Sabbath ends with the recitation of the *Havdalah* prayer, which marks the end of the holy Sabbath and the resumption of profane time. Over the course of the Sabbath three meals must be eaten, and the family attends a service at the synagogue on Saturday morning (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:336).

Community and marriage

The widest and perhaps most fundamental concept of a Jewish community is that of a “people” or “nation” (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:94). As “children of Israel”, Jews have organised themselves into communities as a way of surviving in changing conditions in the places where they have settled (ibid.). Following John P. Dean (1955:247), community may be defined in terms of the following principles which I have reformulated to explain the community in Durban: the concentration of Jews in a particular area; activities required for the maintenance and sustenance of that community; a common culture, beliefs and practices shared by all its members; and its own organisational structures. These four principles are the more tangible aspects making up the Jewish community in Durban, to which one can add the more abstract concept of community which relates to the land of Israel and their return to it.

However, Jewish community and identity in Durban is a result of the historical processes that began with, and has its associations in the early history of, the Jewish people. The first Temple, or the holy Temple, built by Solomon on Mount Moriah, was destroyed in 587 BCE by Nebuchadnezzar and this precipitated the first exile of Jews from Israel, thereby beginning the first Diaspora. In the year 70 CE Titus destroyed the Second Temple, which caused most Jews to move away from the land of Israel, thereby beginning the second Diaspora of Jews from the holy land.

These two exiles into the Parthian and Roman empires (Borowitz 1987:132) and the disintegrating effects of the destruction of the Temples and their subsequent deportations, influenced the way in

which Judaism developed as a religion outside its land of origin, with emphasis centring around the synagogue. Outside Israel, the synagogue would develop as a "minor sanctuary" in substitute for the Temple, which was the "major sanctuary" (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:138).

In order to keep the commandments and continue their faith, the Jews of Durban established congregations, and various other communal institutions based on their places of origin in Europe which reflected their liturgical traditions and even their diverse political connections, established cemeteries and made provisions for the observance of *kashrut*. It was therefore necessary and practical for Jews to live in close proximity to other Jews and, most importantly, for the maintenance of the weekly Sabbath festival and the adherence to the religious requirement of walking to the synagogue. The localisation of residences near the synagogue for Jews is more than just a practical matter of spatial proximity to the religious centre but shows the close inter-relatedness of the community and its religious matrices. This symbiotic relationship between the personal and the community is inter-linked with the sacred and is tied to all Jewish practice.

Jews live by a sequence of regularly recurring events beginning with the daily, the weekly, and the annual, as inter-related dimensions of time simultaneously relating the personal with community. The important stages of an individual's life, marking the transition from one state to another, are marked by rituals that are not just personal but involve the participation of the community. On the eight day after his birth, a newborn boy is circumcised in a ceremony held in the synagogue.[35] At thirteen the boy becomes an adult member of the community in a ritual ceremony of a *bar-mitzvah*, and is given full personal responsibility to perform the commandments of Judaism. When a girl reaches her religious majority at twelve, the equivalent ceremony is held for her in a *bat-mitzvah.*[36] Both these ceremonies are followed by extensive celebrations in which the community participates.

Marriage, the birth of children, death, which are all sanctified by prayer and ritual, are social acts that call for community participation.

Marriage is considered to be a fundamental religious obligation; it is through marriage that the biblical commandment to have children is obeyed (Borowitz 1987:131). This commandment is linked to the covenant made by god with the Jewish people, thus allowing it to be perpetuated (Unterman 1981:147).

According to Jewish law since the second century CE, it is the women who confer Jewish identity on their offspring. Before this, the offspring of unions between Jew and gentile took the status of the father. If the father was a gentile and the mother was Jewish, the children would not have become members of the Jewish community. If a gentile woman married a Jewish man, she would have abandoned her religion and followed the religion of her husband. There was no ritual conversion; the undertaking of marriage itself to a Jewish man was *de facto* an act of conversion (Cohen 1989:25). The children of this marriage were then Jewish, inheriting the status as Jews from their father. The rabbis of the second century CE presumed an entirely different system. According to rabbinic law the status of the offspring in inter-marriage depended on the mother. Conversion was available to a gentile woman whose children in the marriage, born after her conversion, would be Jews. If she did not convert, neither she nor her offspring would be regarded as Jewish (ibid.:26), even if the father of the offspring was a Jew. What impelled the rabbis to introduce this change from a patrilineal to a matrilineal kinship is apparently unknown (ibid.). A gentile who becomes a Jew through conversion is called a proselyte, that is, "a Jew of a peculiar sort" (ibid.:30).

This structural fact decreed by the rabbinical office gives women the responsibility over the religious identities of their offspring. And because being a Jew means that one should keep the commandments or *mitzvoth*, offer exclusive devotion to the god of the Jews, and be well integrated into the Jewish community (Cohen 1989:26), it is incumbent on the eligible Jew, man or woman, to choose a suitable partner for marriage. The religious law and the commandments to keep themselves holy and separate, their extensive traditions and their particular history – which serve as group identity markers – is so deeply ingrained in Jews that they take it for granted that Jews will marry Jews.

Marriage brings together not just the couple, but families and communities and others "in a network that strongly influences the marriage" (Yinger 1968:104). In Judaism, one marries into community membership to continue the practices of the Jewish household and the entire Jewish social structure. Therefore, one can argue that in Judaism marriage is a phenomenon. Inter-marriage, therefore, is disruptive to the religious and social harmony of the Jews in Durban.

It is evident from the data that for many Jews inter-marriage is a concern. The problem facing many Jews in Durban is that they are small in number and this makes finding suitable marriage partners difficult within the confines of this community, hence the "sustainability of the community is an overwhelming concern".[37] While the Reformed Jews more readily accept conversions for the

purpose of marriage and offer appropriate methods of overseeing the process, the Orthodox are very strict about the candidates they accept for conversion as the process is long and demanding because it includes in its syllabus, along with the study of *Torah*, classes on the extensive practice of *kashrut*. Implicit in the conversion process is the acceptance on the part of the convert of the teachings, beliefs and practices of Judaism whether Orthodox or Reform. A period of study precedes conversion when the candidate for conversion can "not only assimilate what is entailed by becoming Jewish", but also reconsider whether or not he or she may want to continue with the decision to convert (Unterman 1981:17).

James H. S. Bossard (1939:792) has argued that knowledge on inter-marriage is important for various reasons. Although these reasons are given in the context of American society, they appear to be fundamental to understanding the problem of inter-marriage among the Jews in Durban as well. Here are two reasons selected from Bossard (ibid.).

Firstly, inter-marriage is an index of the assimilative process. Secondly, considering that marriage is such a particularly intimate relationship, not just between two individuals, but usually also between the families of those individuals, a high degree of inter-marriage between two groups suggests that there is considerable social acceptance between the two population groups involved. Conversely, a high degree of marriage within a group would indicate that the group concerned has an intense cultural or racial consciousness and maintains a distinct distance between itself and other people living in the same geographical area.

Will Herberg (1955) in his study of interfaith marriages in the Unites States noted that there was no suggestion that immigrants were assimilating into a "melting pot" which he extended over the representatives of three faiths, Protestant, Catholic, and Jew. What this model proposed was that Jewish distinctiveness would remain in existence through marital behaviour. What many fear is that inter-marriage, especially where conversions are not carried out properly, may result in Jews diminishing in numbers. There is substantial evidence to show that most of the participants expressed a strong desire and preference for their children to share their own religious and cultural traits. Among the Jews of Durban, intermarriages are severely regulated, especially among the Orthodox Jews, often explicitly giving the difficulties of socialisation of offspring into the religious and social spheres of life as the main validation.

The problem is that many Jews fear that their grandchildren will not be raised according to the precepts of Judaism because of inter-marriage or that their own children may not continue the practices they were brought up with when they inter-marry. According to a model of cultural transmission used by Alberto Topa Bisin *et al*. (2004:622-3), parents have a "high taste and a technology for transmitting their own religious faith to their children". Compared to parents in heterogamous marriages, they argue, "parents in homogamous marriages have a better technology to socialise their offspring to their own trait. As a consequence, homogamous unions have a higher value than heterogamous ones, and agents are willing to spend effort to segregate into a restricted marriage pool in which they are more likely to meet prospective spouses of the same religious faith. The preference for socialisation therefore drives the marriage choice of the agents".

However, before the socialisation of children, it is important for the couple themselves to have certain common features if the marriage is to be successful. Ernest Burgess (1939) conducted studies throughout the 1930s to produce rules to tell when marriages fail and when they prosper. In a survey of over 500 couples, Burgess concluded that the greater the level of shared culture between the couple, (which he defined as family background, religious affiliation, social activities, and ideas of marriage) the more probable it was that the couple could become engaged in what he called a well-adjusted marriage. For Jews, it would appear that for a marriage to be well-adjusted and have success they would have to share some of the basic tenets of the faith such as keeping dietary laws, and important festivals such as Sabbath, more than a belief in simply the creed of Judaism.

All the participants in this study said that it would make them extremely happy if their children would marry Jewish partners. The women generally articulated this well when asked about who they would like their children to marry: "I would like the girl to be Jewish",[38] or, "I would love my sons to marry beautiful Jewish women",[39] or "I would really love to have Jewish grandchildren".[40] Where Jewish partners were not available they didn't mind who their children married as long as by the time they get married they are both Jewish. Leah Harris was very adamant that the process of conversion must precede marriage where the partner is not Jewish. For Leah relationships are by themselves difficult and not having the same religion in a marriage can bring on more problems especially when marriage has consequences such as children. For, she says, "suddenly the children need to be circumcised" and the unconverted partner responds, "Ooh no, that's too barbaric". For Leah, therefore, the couple has to conform to the same goals in a marriage by "buying into a lifestyle" and "the fact that we are an identity".[41]

Conclusion

I have shown how a people with deeply conservative and traditional religious practices, who were motivated by poverty and oppression, left their homeland and came to South Africa, where some finally settled in Durban. What was shown is that a group of people, who were encouraged to set up their practices, have reproduced and reconstructed their identities in Durban through the pursuit of *kashrut*, Sabbath, and by keeping marriages endogamous.

Endnotes

[1] A.L. Basham (1967:339) has argued that in India, congregational worship in early Hinduism was unknown and would only develop in the medieval period among a few sects. Those who went to temple either went alone or with family, made their offerings and departed.
[2] Ramchunder, Ramesh. 28th October 2010, p3. Interview at the O.R. Tambo Airport: Johannesburg.
[3] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p6. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[4] Kumar, Rajesh. 8th September 2010, p2. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[5] Naidu, Yeshen. 31 August 2010, p5. Interview at his home in Greenwood Park: Durban.
[6] Ramchunder. Ramesh, 28th October 2010, p1. Interview at the O.R. Tambo Airport: Johannesburg.
[7] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p4. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[8] ibid.
[9] Mudaliar, Sivan. 29th June 2010, p7. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[10] Raju, Kovlin. 8th September 2010, p3. Interview at his home in Durban North: Durban.
[11] Gopinath, Romilla. 29th August 2010, p1. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[12] Mudaliar, Sivan. 29th June 2010, p1-2. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[13] Prasad, Ajay. 28th July 2010, p6. Interview at his home in Woodhurst: Chatsworth.
[14] Chopra, Shoba. 31st August 2010, p4. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[15] In 19th century India, neo-Hindu groups, campaigning against Westernisation and Christianisation, (Brockington 1981) or responding to socio-religious realities, referred to themselves as movements. Pratap Kumar (2000:120-1) argues that in present day South Africa the term movement is no longer appropriate because these groups have taken on the characteristics of denomination with specific doctrinal systems and traditions. While this is true, the participants continued to refer to the Hare Krishna organisation as a movement and I maintain use of this term to mean a body of persons with a common object.
[16] I attended a Ganesha (a Hindu-god: the elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati) *Abhishekam* at a small Temple in Park Station Road in Greenwood Park, Durban, to witness the ritual bathing of this presiding deity. It was conducted by the resident priest and assisted by other elders of the temple, clad in white cotton dhotis. The deity was washed in water, milk, yoghurt (curd), honey, and other ingredients several times over. Devotees stood in front of the inner sanctum housing the deity and watched the ritual in an attitude of reverence. After the bathing was over, the priest closed the curtains in front of the sanctuary. Only the priest and the assistants remained behind the curtains to dress and decorate the deity. Then the curtains were opened and the priest continued with the prayers in the deity's honour.
[17] Chatsworth is a residential area that was set aside for Indian occupation in the early 1960s during apartheid. It was created to absorb Indians who were displaced in terms of the Group Areas Act and it was geographically positioned to act as a buffer between white residential areas and the Black township of Umlazi. Small formal housing was provided for rent.
[18] Temples, I learned, are not just architectural feats; to be successful the builder has to consider the geographic positioning and directional orientation of the building as well. This piece of information has also helped me to understand the outrage expressed by the members of the Sri Lakshmi Narayan Temple when their temple was demolished following expropriation in Sirdar Road in Clairwood to make way for the construction of the Southern Freeway in 1966.The temple was transplanted to Mobeni Heights, and given the

restrictions of the new place, its geography and orientation, the members of the temple struggled to re-build their religious place to fit the prescribed requirements. Although cultic practices at the temple continue, there is in this story told by Rajesh, the experience of a religious space or what Eliade (1959:24) has called "privileged space", which is qualitatively different from other spaces, such as the birth place of a person, the scenes of his first love, and in the case of Rajesh the temple associated with his ancestors and his early childhood, that still retain an "exceptional and unique quality" for him. They are, says Eliade, "holy places of his private universe". (Kumar, 8th September 2010, p3. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban).

[19] Chopra, Shoba. 31st August 2010, p5. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.

[20] According to Edward B. Harper (1964:181-2) *pada puja*, is common practice among the Havik Brahmins of south India. Harper indicates that in this ritual different degrees of rank can be discerned depending on whether feet are merely touched, washed, or whether they are washed and the liquid is drunk. The example he gives, among others, include the visiting woman *sadhu*, whose feet were bathed in *panchagavya* (a mixture of cow dung, urine, milk, *ghee*, and curd) and then passed around to be drunk as a sacred liquid. The act indicated that she was accorded the status of a god.

[21] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p9. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.

[22] Devan, Vimala. 8th September 2010, 9-10. Interview at her home in Durban North: Durban.

[23] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p10. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.

[24] Zuleikha Mayat (1961/2011:128) in her entry on "Bhaji" or spinach says that the early Indian immigrants brought with them, or later imported seeds and roots carefully tied up in "homespun white calico 'kerchiefs' and entrusted them to foreign soil". Much of the fresh produce sold at the Indian markets, she says, are not indigenous to South Africa.

[25] According to O.P. Joshi (1992:220-22), the sari is worn longer among the higher classes and castes of India. Among the middle and lower castes of women, the shorter length is preferred while working in the fields and doing other activities.

[26] Devan, Vimala 8th September 2010. Interview at her home in Durban North: Durban.

[27] Ezra, Samuel. 21st October 2010, p2. Interview at the Pick n Pay Kosher Butchery, Musgrave Road: Durban.

[28] Pale of Settlement: pale, from the Latin *palus*, means a pole or stake, and denotes an area with a clear boundary. Pale of Settlement refers to an area in former Russia to which Jews were restricted and where they were oppressed and subjected to periodic pogroms.

[29] Rosenthal, Caleb. 22nd October 2010. Interview at his home in La Lucia: Durban.

[30] Before the second century CE, the offspring of a union took the status of the father. If a gentile woman married a Jewish man, the act of marriage to a Jewish man was *de facto* an act of conversion. According to rabbinic law, the status of the offspring of intermarriage followed that of the mother (Cohen 1989:25-26).

[31] Ezra, Samuel. 21st October 2010, p4. Interview at the Pick n Pay Kosher Butchery, Musgrave Road: Durban.

[32] Davidson, Isaac. 20th October 2010, p6. Interview at The National Society of the Arts Gallery, Bulwer Road: Durban

[33] Kominsky, Abraham. 22nd October 2010, p6. Interview at Eden College, Glenmore: Durban.

[34] The belief that Jews have been chosen by god above all other people is mentioned in the Bible and repeated regularly in Jewish liturgy. While this doctrine is central to Jewish theology, its precise meaning is not clear. Some interpretations include the narrow concept of superiority; the biblical emphasis on the election of Israel led to the idea that there was a moral or even racial excellence inherent in the Jewish people. The other interpretation of chosen people is related to the idea of a holy people, or as one Jewish participant says: "...we are not chosen for any kind of superiority, we are chosen to live this particular discipline of holiness over and above your commonsense morality" (Ezra, 21st October 2010, p6. Interview at the Pick n Pay Kosher Butchery, Musgrave Road: Durban). Perhaps the sociological significance is put well by another participant: "We are chosen because we chose; not that we were chosen...I think that we are different...and exclusive in that we are excluded from things and we exclude from things" (Silberman, 21st October 2010, p7. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban).

[35] Circumcision is the removal of the foreskin in an operation that is performed on all male Jewish children and male converts to Judaism. The commandment to circumcise was given to Abraham (the first patriarch of the Hebrew people) and his descendants, and was to be carried out as an obligation and sign of loyalty and adherence to Judaism (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:90,100).

[36] *Bat-mitzvah* is a practice that is mainly recognised by Reformed Jews. Orthodox Jews look with disapproval on any participation of women in the synagogue – a doctrinal difference between the two positions.

[37] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p5. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.

[38] Adam, Rebekah. 13th October 2010, p3. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.

[39] Silberman, Abigail. 21st October 2010, p5. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[40] Rubenstein, Tamar. 25th October 2010, p5. Interview at her home in Hillcrest: Durban.
[41] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p6. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.

Chapter 4

Introduction

In Chapter 3 I have argued that there was no single Hindu tradition ever present among the diasporas of Hindus in Durban. What I showed was how their beliefs and practices were reproduced within their new surroundings, and how they recreated their religion in Durban. I looked at the historical circumstances that prompted migration from India and settlement in Durban. In addition, I discovered that there were certain practices associated with the prohibition of the cow and concepts of purity and pollution that persist in their current practices. The only route to understanding these key practices was to understand how remnants of the caste system underpinned them. I therefore briefly outlined the purity and pollution laws around food, marriage and commensality, as they appeared in the caste system.

I have argued that the Hindus who settled in Durban were a diverse group with no central form of worship that existed around a temple of a communal nature, nor any form of social or political organisation. I argued that it was the neo-Hindu movements that played a significant role in homogenising the group through its leadership and organisational elements.

The particular taboo applied to the cow by Hindus cannot be viewed in discrete terms because it fits into a larger system of beliefs and practices, resulting in everyday practices and prescriptions that complement such a proscription. These prescriptions take the form of a complex cultic life made up of the honouring of deities, life-cycle rituals, rituals for ancestors, pilgrimage, and calendars and festivals. I singled out the Hare Krishna group as an example of how purity and pollution laws are manifested in personal and public cultic practices.

In this chapter, I show how dietary restrictions are formed around the exclusion of the cow by Hindus in Durban, and how these restrictions are constructed to preserve their religious and social identities and act as a marker of differentiation. The taboo on the cow is placed in a larger context of the beliefs and practices held by the Hindus in their daily lives, and this is intrinsically wrapped up in the practices of accompanying prescriptions in order to maintain such a proscription. These prescriptions by which the Hindus conduct their lives are evident in their complex personal and public cultic practices, which display the rules of purity and pollution attached to their religious identities. How does refraining from eating certain foods, accompanied by a given set of religious

practices, express and reinforce the values of this religious community? How flexible are these practices? Are there sanctions placed on those who do violate the practice of the avoidance on the cow? Are they in any way made to feel lesser Hindus if they do not adhere to the proscriptions? This chapter shows what the Hindu practitioners themselves have to say about the prohibition on eating the cow, and how group purity and identity is protected and maintained.

This discussion will be set out by considering whether Hinduism is regarded as a religion by its practitioners; how the cow, being sacred and inviolable, is a symbol of Hindu identity; how festivals as cultic practice become a marker of Hindu identity in Durban; and how notions of purity and pollution are tied in to the importance of ablutions and clothing in the preservation of Hindu identity.

The Hindus

Hinduism in Durban

In Durkheim's definition of religion, "sacred beings are separated beings. That which characterizes them is that there is a break of continuity between them and the profane beings...A whole group of rites has the object of realizing this state of separation which is essential. Since their function is to prevent undue mixings and to keep one of these two domains from encroaching upon the other, they are only able to impose abstentions or negative acts...They do not prescribe certain acts to the faithful, but confine themselves to forbidding certain ways of acting; so they all take the form of interdictions, or as is commonly said by ethnographers, of *taboos*" (Durkheim 1915:299-300, italics in the original text).

It is this total opposition between the sacred and the profane and the requisite interdictions which appear in the form of taboos for the observant Hindu that Durkheim considers the formula for social integration. The various rules and laws accompanying separation and avoidance of certain food such as the flesh of the cow are the characteristic traits of the manifestation of the sacred and all that is religious, and it stands in contradistinction to the profane. Proscribed food, therefore, is edged in a myriad of prescriptions, and the sacred and the profane are the two sides of the religious coin.

Do Hindus in Durban consider Hinduism to be a religion?

It is difficult to define Hinduism in Durban as a single religious phenomenon. As Hinduism did not start off as a single religious practice pertaining to a single transcendent realm or supreme being, the Hindus in Durban are really a "cultural expression" (Lipner 2006:94) of the bewildering diversity of various historical strands of beliefs and practices that could never have been summed up in one big book of scripture, hence the dozens of sacred texts. What I as an observer have been looking at and calling "religion" among the Hindus in Durban, may inadvertently have led me to suggest that there is an overall unity and coherence which the Hindus there may not themselves recognise. Ursula King (1989) has referred to this as a methodological problem of "observer's construct", applying it to sets of activities where the participants themselves may not necessarily call what they do religious. And yet there are some "sacred threads", to use J.L. Brockington's (1981) phrase, evident among the Hindus in Durban which identifies them as a distinct group of people having certain distinguishing marks of behaviour that are unmistakeably Hindu.

It was evident in the interviews with the Hindu participants that while some of these "sacred threads" may be seen as having overlapping features among them, there are as many Hinduisms as there are participants in this study; every observant Hindu may reveal their identity by showing that they belong to a certain brand of Hinduism which may reflect some similarities, but the heterogeneity of practices and beliefs remain personal and subjective as to how they are interpreted. This is not to say that the adherents practice what Karel Dobbelaere (2011:201) has called "à la carte" religion where the practitioner "picks and chooses" his ritual and ethical norms. On the contrary, there are certain beliefs and practices that remain as given and unchangeable and are accepted by the participants.

Among the participants there is a clear knowledge that religion began in its respect for and harmony with nature. They are aware, too, that this religion does not have the idea of a god that is concerned with salvation; that is to say, that the god or gods are not involved with the act of saving human beings from sin and its consequences, and then to ultimately admit them to heaven. Hindus take note of the fact that historically they are not a religious grouping of people, and that the term Hinduism is an omnibus concept to bring together the disparate belief systems and practices born on the Indian soil. Unfortunately, Hindus are referred to as "pagans" because it is assumed that they believe in "thousands of gods" rather than in their symbolism:

> I think that people are beginning to understand that paganism is not something heathen and terrible that takes us to hell...It was a simple way of expressing nature in a way that we can relate to.[1]

The Hindu participants in this study are third, fourth and fifth generation descendants of the indentured workers and other Hindus coming as entrepreneurs, who began arriving in Durban more than 150 years ago. From the various accounts written of their migrant ancestors in the early settlements in Durban, it is clear that religion formed the base around which they organised their lives (Bhana and Vahed 2006:245; Kuper 1960; Vertovec 1992:57). From the time that their ancestors arrived in Durban, they established wattle and daub shrines and small temples on the sugar estates where they laboured, thus making and marking the first crucial steps in the foundation and reconstruction of their religious practices in their new environment.

I asked the participants if they had any knowledge of how their ancestors instituted their culture and practices in Durban, and their responses showed that they did to varying degrees. One participant marvelled at his grandfather who came to a new country at sixteen and who assisted other Hindus by performing the *Katha* festival at their homes without having a written copy of the mantras of the *puja*. He did eventually record the mantras by hand, which he left for his progeny.[2]

Another participant recalled, rather passionately, her father who was principal of an English and Tamil school who, with others, inaugurated the eisteddfod movement in Durban. He wrote and put out plays in Tamil. “It was in the Railway and Magazine barracks...where the true culture was”, she says, recalling the late nights of rehearsals there and their walk back home to Umbilo when it was safe to do so.[3]

Yeshen Naidu remembers that from “a very early age” his grandparents held a regular Sunday service at their home.[4]

It is evident from the limited accounts by these participants that the desire to set up and maintain their religious identities was present from the start. However, determined as they were to do this, there were many countervailing forces that resulted from the disruption of Indians in the two demographic shifts that took place between 1920 and 1930, and again in the 1950s. The consequences of the enforcement of the Group Areas Act in the 1950s forced thousands of families to leave the city of Durban, from places such as the Magazine and Railways Barracks, as mentioned

above by Lutchmee Murugan, and settle in Chatsworth and Phoenix. The re-settlement meant that Hindus were removed from their places of worship (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:3). The stress resulting from the dislocation and disorientation led to large numbers of Hindus converting to Christianity (Pillay *et al.* 1989:152).

For the Hindus in this early period of settlement, religion revolved mainly around the domestic altar in the home, and this was not conducive to creating any form of corporate or congregational behaviour among them. This lack of group identity and the absence of some form of religious expression in the home made them willing converts to Christianity and Islam. Together with these factors, Hindus experiencing economic and social pressures became more vulnerable to conversion.[5]

However, conversion is not a problem that was experienced only in the early period of indenture and just after indenture; it continues as a problem for Hindus even today.

Conversion

Conversion is used in the religious sense and it is defined here as the wilful adoption of another religion and incorporation into a new community of believers.

I have been defining religion in the Durkheimian way by seeing religion as a set of beliefs and practices having certain restrictions placed on all those who adhere to these beliefs and practices. The result would be that those who believe and do the same things form a collective identity, while conversion would produce the opposite effect on the group by fragmenting and weakening its strength and boundaries.

For Hindus conversion is usually perceived as an idea associated with proselytising world religions which originated outside India, particularly with Christianity and Islam. The concept of conversion to Hindus is therefore a western idea. The origins lie in the prototype of the old paradigm of the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus (Kilbourne and Richardson 1989:1) as found in the Book of Acts, Chapter 22, in the Bible. Paul's conversion to Christianity is an example of a conversion that is brought about by an external agent where the recipient has no control over such transformation (ibid.:1-2).

There are some religious traditions, like Christianity and Islam, which are said to be proselytising or evangelising religions with a mandate to convert unbelievers to their system of beliefs, which is inherent to these religions. Other religions, like Hinduism and Judaism, oppose the idea of making converts of those who do not share the same beliefs and would prefer to increase numerically through natural reproductive means. Therefore marriages are in principal endogamous, with matched religious affiliations in such alliances. Indeed, I have more than once heard it said by Hindus who participated in this study that they would prefer their children to marry Hindus who belong to the same or similar traditions that they observe.

The problem that concerns me here now is not that there are conversions into Hinduism but in fact, it is the opposite problem of conversions from Hinduism to other religions, notably Christianity and Islam. Many Hindus I interviewed, particularly those involved in leadership positions in the various Hindu organisations, have expressed their aversion towards the proselytising efforts of Christians and speak of conversion with incomprehension and unease. Why do Hindus convert to other religions, and how do these conversions affect group identity?

Historically, and as I have shown in Chapter 3, Hinduism lacked centralised ecclesiastical structures and the legal and scholastic traditions present in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. While these faiths may be regarded as religions, Hinduism cannot be accorded the same status given that there are so many different organisations subsumed under the omnibus term Hinduism, making it difficult to pinpoint it as a religion with a fixed set of tenets and precepts. Edward B. Harper (1964, f.n.2:151), has replaced the term “orthodox” with “orthoprax” in speaking of Hinduism as a system emphasising ritual aspects of religious behaviour rather than its belief content. The diversity of rituals, in form and content, found in the different organisations, and the route chosen by each of approaching divinity through monistic or theistic pathways, has in itself given rise to a pluralism of religious ideas. The lack of centralised stabilising structures has made it difficult to speak of Hinduism as a single religious tradition with clear and distinct boundaries. However, signs of homogenisation and centralisation have appeared in Durban through organisations such as the Hindu Maha Sabha and Hindu missions dispatched from India in response to the Christian and Muslim missionaries, in their attempt to create a common Hindu identity.

The problem of religious conversion had already been set in motion in India and several new movements that emerged in the nineteenth century had all been essentially geared towards re-

considering and re-marshalling the beliefs and practices of Hinduism in keeping with the challenges of modernity and to address the problem of religious pluralism.

Various representatives from the different Hindu movements came to Durban, among them Bhai Parmanand (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:66; Desai and Vahed 2010:248) and Swami Shankeranand (Naidoo 1992:7), and attempted to give Hindus a common identity, to the extent that what M.N. Srinivas and A. M. Shah (1968:365) claim has been happening on a parochial village-level in modern India was beginning to take place in Durban; "everywhere village deities...seem to be losing ground, while the prestigious Sanskritic[6] deities are becoming popular".

Between 1900 and 1915 twelve Hindu organisations emerged (Meer 1969:143), beginning a mini renaissance among the Hindus which culminated in the formation of the Hindu Maha Sabha in 1912. From the 1960s, after the upheavals caused by apartheid, it would appear that Hindus had become more settled, having restored traditional religious forms and having cultivated a more formalised approach to the teaching of their religion and practice.

However, many Hindus have converted to Christianity and Islam. Why do Hindus in Durban convert?

The question of why Hindus convert is a question that anthropologists and sociologists have taken up in various studies on the problem of why people in general convert in other contexts (Rambo 1982; Shinn 1993; Hefner 1993). Their main issues have been over the recognition of the principal incentives in conversion and "a critical assessment of the role of Christianity or social, economic and political aspirations in the process of conversion" (Kim 2003:2). The role of the missionaries is emphasised here, reflecting the person converting as a passive recipient in the promulgation of the gospel. In Durban, these issues are reflected in studies on the early Christian communities that were formed as a consequence of those missionary endeavours among the indentured workers which uplifted them socially and spiritually and provided them with much needed health and educational facilities (Henning 1983; Pillay 1991). Education and health, then, became the motives for conversion.

Hinduism has a natural tendency to recognise the divine basis of all religions of the world. However, its relationship to Christianity in Durban, which was the religious persuasion of the coloniser and the dominant religion during most of the twentieth century, is an ambivalent one; Hindu adherents have reacted negatively to the conversion of large numbers of Hindus to Christianity, which has in many

instances displaced Hinduism and altered the customs of these people with whom it has come into contact. This makes ecumenism and dialogue between the groups difficult. The proselytising efforts of Christians are viewed as a mortal threat by Hindus, especially among those who remain staunch practitioners.

Although Hindus do not possess a missionary mandate to go out and make Hindus of people, they have nevertheless participated in missionary enterprises, beginning in the early nineteenth century with reform movements in reaction to Christianity and Islam in India (Brockington 1981). One can also say that among the Hare Krishnas, the missionary zeal is part of their strategy to get people back to god. However, Hindus in Durban do not on the whole want to convert other people who do not share similar beliefs and practices. They are happy that people believe something, and if conversion to another religion should occur they are happy, too, if it is done with conviction and not out of ignorance of their own religion. If, after examination of his or her own traditions, the potential convert decides that the "tradition is without light then by all means"[7] they can go ahead with the process of conversion. The attitude of Hindus toward Christians is captured in a piece from Sivan who shows a loyalty in his own attitude to Swami Sivananda, the founder of the neo-Hindu movement. He relates how the swami's attitude to Christians shows that he was not against them but resisted the denigration of Hindus by Christians, insisting that Hindus remain firm in their belief without feeling inferior to other religions. When Hindus felt devalued in their religion the swami would say, quoted by Sivan Mudaliar:

> Gird up your loins and be a Hindu.[8]

However, not all Hindus feel this way towards Christians in Durban. A major neo-Hindu movement has established and maintained very cordial links with the Catholics, Jews and Buddhists and they appear to be getting on well. Is it perhaps because they know that these Hindus are not inclined to convert them? According to the presiding swami under whose auspicious these relations are cultivated, there is no attempt made to convert anybody. They are regarded by the establishment simply as "good friends". The swami noted the "good bridges" that have been built with, for example, a mission hospital run by nuns and whose numbers have in recent years been dwindling, creating a shortage of staff. The association of this neo-Hindu movement with the hospital, through their medical help, has opened a dialogue of action and service between the two groups, giving them a common disposition. [9]

There were numerous participants who gave various reasons to explain the problem of conversion among Hindus to other religions. Many have argued that there are too many rituals in Sanathanist forms of practice that confuse young practitioners. They are also confounded by the multiplicity of gods and they are unable to get clarity from their parents (who don't really know the answers themselves) as to why there are so many gods in Hinduism. Ritualistic animal sacrifices confound them even further, making them feel like they don't know what they are doing. Furthermore, there was a lack of trained clergy to conduct ceremonies, especially at funerals, and the dearth of theologically trained teachers meant that there was no religious education or very little of it. Whatever education existed was mainly present in the home, where the domestic language was taught, and where Hinduism was presented through the oral tradition of recounting its myths and legends as a way of preserving the religion(Pillay *et al*.1989:145).

But the answers are not so easy; many participants seem to say that Hindus leave the faith because the religious path for Hindus is not "straight forward". In comparing Hinduism to Christianity, Hindus feel that Christianity "is very straight and structured and very simple", whereas Hinduism is "philosophical" with plenty of leeway for adherents to do and think as they feel.[10] It might also appear that those who convert to Christianity do so because there are no restrictions on the individual in terms of proscribed foods, the use of alcohol, and on enjoyment of the general sensory pleasures of the world. Romilla Gopinath, a Hare Krishna devotee who is assiduous about keeping their four regulative commandments, says that the lives of Christians are simple: "You wake up on Sunday, you go to Church, you come back, you eat, drink, and do anything you want".[11]

The conversions of Hindus to Christianity, in particular, may appear to be taking place out of "ignorance" and "irrational" behaviour, according to Vishen, who is the spiritual head of a Hindu organisation. The problem is about economics; Christianity attracts converts to its fold because it has the facilities to do so in terms of clergy on stipendiary, and large resources to put up flashy campaigns. The other problem relates to the content of Hinduism; it is vast and diverse and it is complicated by its rituals and philosophy and the various approaches to understanding the beliefs and traditions within the religion. Hinduism is so indeterminate that one almost does not know where to start or where to end. The view held by Vishen Shah is that "an understanding of certain basic ideas and approaches would endear them [Hindus] to their religion". However, many Hindus, he confesses, want to approach god through the "diverse ways" presented in Hinduism. This will be valid, he argues, if it "satisfied" the individual. Unfortunately this does not always satisfy the individual who then changes his spiritual path.[12]

However, does a satisfaction for one's religion start by informing one's self about one's religion? Perhaps it would, but the problems that came with indenture may have prevented Hindus from continuing with their religion. Many of the Hindus who came as indentured labourers, it was argued by some Hindu religious leaders, did not understand their own religion; they were not "scholars of religion and philosophy", nor were they "theologians" and this was a "tremendous disadvantage".[13] What they brought with them was a few rituals which they performed without knowing their content and meaning. Being poor and disempowered and unable to reconcile this with their beliefs they sought to get answers from Christianity.

Another participant argued that the Christian evangelists, being rich and powerful, were able to provide these poor Hindus with certain support structures. These evangelists apparently also secured for the converts low-level employment in various places of work. This was vastly attractive to the poor apostates who were at least able to secure a plate of food at the end of each day. It didn't help also that the Dutch Reformed Church, which was closely connected to the White minority government at the time, had a "set and calculated programme" to convert Indians and Africans to Christianity. This was part of the old colonial policy that if you converted people to Christianity they would become "more loyal to the White government", become westernised, eat with a "fork and spoon" and ultimately would accept the culture as well.[14]

It is important to note that the indentured labourers who came to Durban were disadvantaged from the start. When they came to Durban, says Ananda Venkatesan, "they had the whole state mechanism, including apartheid,[15] against them". The attitude of the coloniser toward Hindus was indicated by the way in which Hinduism as a religion was covered in the media, which was "anti-Hindu". Hindus found this very demoralising. Also, there were more job opportunities for Christians. In order for Hindus to obtain employment they had to convert to Christianity. Ananda, noting that the political reality has changed, says that Hindus are able to secure employment and they now have good reasons to stay attached to Hindu organisations.[16]

If Hinduism is a religion that accepts the divine basis of all religions and has a friendly accommodation towards them, could it be that this broadness of approach in its natural constitution may prove to be a problem? In other words, when most other religions claim a certain chauvinism about what it is they believe, Hinduism lacks such a claim. Could this jeopardise or compromise their position, thus leading to conversions? The answers to this question came as a vehement no from

many participants. “We must understand this from a positive point of view and not from a point of weakness” is the general feeling that has emerged about the liberal attitude of Hindus. And if some of the values and concepts of Hinduism, such as “vegetarianism, yoga, reincarnation, and karma”, have entered Western thinking, Hindus feel their liberal attitude is not a fault.[17]

The problem is that Christians believe that non-Christians are heathens and because of this belief they unashamedly try to convert others. What Hindus object to is the fact that Christians tend to denigrate Hindus. Sivan Mudaliar puts it very well when he says:

> You don’t have to speak of the weakness of other religions just so that you may elevate yourself. Just speak about the greatness of your own religion.[18]

Amrith Patil, a retired professor of Indian Philosophy, is the son of immigrant parents from Maharashtra who came to Durban to set up businesses. He tells a story of when he was a young man helping in his father’s business, who among others, traded with the Indian people in the Merebank areas who lived in “tin shacks”, after having been relocated from Penzance Road during apartheid. He sold them saris and other clothing. One day a kombi arrived there and he heard a woman from a Hindu home say to her children, “Dress up, dress up, the kombi has come”. The vehicle had come to take the children to a nearby church that was temporarily housed in the stables in that area (the Clairwood Racecourse). After the children had been taken, Amrith asked the woman, “Why are you sending your child to the church?” She answered, “They keep our children out of mischief”. When the matter was later taken up with Swami Nishalanada he said that “the Christians should be allowed to preach and we should not interfere with them. This was very much part of the Hindu thinking”, concludes Amrith.[19]

From this above statement it is clear that while there may have been individuals who wanted a stricter attitude towards Christians and Christian conversion, it would appear that the swami refused to lay down rules about the behaviour of those who convert. In a similar instance, the Maha Sabha refused to be authoritarian in a matter where a participant wanted it to make a ruling from the top to all its member organisations that only strict vegetarianism would be allowed.[20] These are some instances where Hinduism reflects its broadness of approach and freedom from narrowness. As Amrith Patil says, paraphrasing a portion of scripture from the *Bhagavad Gita*: Krishna, the guide, tells Arjuna, the Pandava prince, after explaining to him the entire content of the ethical and moral struggles of human life: “I have said everything to you regarding the relation of man to god...but you

do as you please". "You won't find this breadth and this latitude of choice", says Amrith, "in any other religion outside Hinduism...you choose. There is no prescription".[21]

Although Hindus have this broadness of approach and breadth in their vision, conversions continue to happen, albeit at a slower pace. There are examples gleaned from the data of various measures they have taken to counter conversion to other religions.

What are Hindus in Durban doing to prevent conversions to other religions?

As was shown in Chapter 3, the stress related to the situational exigencies of dislocation and disorientation as a result of the effects of the Group Areas Act in Durban, meant that large numbers of Hindus converted to Pentecostal Christianity (Pillay *et al.* 1989:152). However, the reasons suggested for conversions are given by participants who remain Hindus and not by those who have converted, so they are assumptions made by Hindu practitioners to try and explain why Hindus convert. As a result, they have been trying to act on these ideas to preserve and maintain group membership and identity.

According to the head of the Hindu Maha Sabha, conversions have dropped as there has been a "greater awakening" among many Hindus who are accepting more readily the religion that they are born into.[22]

Some of the most pressing issues raised by the participants as to why Hindus convert to other religions has to do with the shortage of trained Hindu clergy, the lack of pastoral care in the community, and the need to educate children and adults about their religion.

The shortage of priests in the Hindu community has been a problem since their forebears settled in Durban. This problem has been recognised among various community leaders and they are now redressing the issue by putting in place corrective measures. For example, Niren Singh, who is very involved in the work of a Sanathanist movement, says that they have realised that the early priests are to be "blamed" for the "position that Hindus find themselves in". His argument is that the study of the *Vedas* was kept exclusively as a priestly privilege. Since the 1970s, their organisation has been conducting classes to train priests. They present a three-year diploma to anybody in their community who is interested in pursuing such work. These trainees include women, which is a broadening from the strict male dominated priestly class. Their only criteria for those who apply is

that they "should be vegetarian and of sober habits". This, they hope, will make a difference to the shortage of clergy, be able to supply the community with the necessary pastoral and social care, and mostly, that there will be a "relationship" created between priest and community. Consequently, this will prevent Hindus from straying from the faith.[23]

The problem of creating a relationship between the Hindu priest and the community is something that has resulted because of the very nature of the way in which Hindu temples operated generally among the Sanathanist form of Hinduism, because the home altar was the locus of *puja* and worship (and still is among all Hindus who participated in this study). The temple was a very private matter in Hindu practice and there was not, as such, a relationship between the priest of the temple and those Hindus who attended. So when the services of a priest were required in the home of such followers to perform a wedding, a *hawan*, a ceremony for the birth or naming of a child, or following death, they would call randomly on any priest in the community that was available to perform whatever the occasion required. Often there was no priest available and the family would be stranded.

Yeshen Naidu told me a story that supports this view, making the point that Hindus need to have not only a good relationship with a priest but a relationship with one that is informed about the religion. He believes, like Niren Singh, mentioned above, that this will stop Hindus from crossing religious borders.

Yeshen's story is about a friend whose mother died during the very inauspicious month of *Paratassie*, which is an extremely religious period during which rituals of food are routinely offered to the dead and pure vegetarianism is meticulously observed. His mother was a very active member who was committed to the life of the temple. However, after her death not a single member of the temple, or the priest, wanted to visit the bereaved family or assist in the arrangements for the interment "because it was a bad time". Death during the month of *Paratassie* was regarded as "polluting". The idea of a corpse, hence, was seen as "dirt at a time of cleansing". Unable to get the services of a Hindu priest to conduct the funeral, the family accepted the services of the Muslims in the community, who took care of the funeral. The child, who was obviously very upset about the manner in which the Hindu community had handled his mother's death, converted to Islam.[24]

Unlike Sanathanist Hinduism, the temple or hall among practitioners of neo-Hinduism is the centre of worship, and of the congregational or collective behaviour which is routinised through the movement's cultic practices. This collective life is intrinsic to neo-Hindu practice, and there will

always be a priest or priests attached to the temple. Members who are part of such organisations enjoy the benefits of communal life and priestly services, and are able to remain spiritually attached.

Ananda Venkatesan, the swami of a large neo-Hindu movement in Phoenix, Durban, says that they are able to provide activities that "attract and keep the youth", thus setting good foundations and establishing good values. It sounds like the swami has got the right formula that keeps the youth interested and drawn to this particular strand of Hinduism as it would appear that the youth are already engaged in the "concept of service", and "singing and chanting" (although he admits that this should not be too long so as to not distract them). What is extraordinary about the efforts of this organisation under the directorship of the swami, is that these youth come from very poor, economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and they are unable to attend more affluent schools and get the requisite balance in their curriculums, so the movement has made provision, among other activities, for the youth to get karate lessons. This is a way of balancing their activities, the spiritual with the social, while getting the youth to stay rooted in the organisation.[25]

Lutchmee Murugan, a former school teacher who is still very committed to education, says that children must be taught properly about their religion, as they will then become adults in their religion. I interviewed her at the time of the festival of *Navarathri*, which she used as an example of an ideal time to "sit with children" and explain to them the details of why the festival is celebrated. She is very keen that children should read more about their religion. This, she argues, will keep them Hindus.[26]

A priest of a temple in Greenwood Park echoes what Lutchmee says, but adds that young people should study their religion, and the religions and cultures of others. This he suggests might even be taught as a subject at school. When children know their own religion and the religions of others, he argues, then there can be "real mixing" without the desire to convert or assimilate.[27]

Other organisations are trying to educate Hindus about scripture such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, so that Hindus can be informed about their religion and its philosophy. The problem that has been diagnosed is that many Hindus appear to only know their religion from the point of view of rituals and ceremonies, and think that this is the crux of Hinduism. What many have pointed out in this study is that rituals are not the only aspect of Hinduism, and that there is a side to Hinduism that has to do with philosophy and scriptural knowledge. When Hindus tire of rituals and fail to understand

the deeper meaning of what it is they are practicing, then they convert to other religions claiming that “there are too many rituals” and that “the rituals are confusing”.[28]

Some organisations, such as the Hare Krishna Movement, have arranged to carry out pastoral care in the community by making “house to house” visits. According to Shoba Chopra, who informed me about the practice, this particular method of making themselves visible in the community “helps draw people” to the religious institution.[29]

In all my discussions with the various leaders of the different Hindu movements in Durban, it was evident that conversion is a problem among Bhakti and Sanathanist forms of Hindu practice. The leaders interviewed in this study, representing some of these movements, have accepted responsibility for the fact that conversions to other religions by their adherents may well have happened because of their own failings, and they are doing everything they can to stabilise the situation and keep members within their respective organisations.

The problem of conversion seems to be less prevalent among the neo-Hindu organisations. Clearly, the formula they apply to making and keeping their community together works very well. The Sanathanists, having noted the problems that have arisen in the early practice of Hinduism in Durban, are making every effort to correct the situation and restore their numbers, and appear to have been fairly successful in this. Perhaps Hindus in Durban have finally heeded the admonition made in the early missionary years to “gird your loins and be Hindus”.

The cow

There are a few schools of thought regarding the analysis of food taboos or food prohibitions. One school represented is the structuralist perspective explains food prohibitions as systems created to avoid ambiguity and dissonance among religious communities (Douglas 1966); another school sees food avoidances as instruments for carrying social ideas metaphorically and symbolically (Tambiah 1969; Bulmer 1967; Buckser 1999; Joelle Bahloul 1995); and there are the cultural materialists and utilitarians who explain food avoidances in terms of the environment (Harris 1966). Whatever the approach taken, the underlying theme that emerges is the relationship humans have to things and the reason why they are induced to classify and categorise those things (Durkheim and Mauss, [1903] 1963).

At the heart of the issue regarding cow avoidance among the Hindus in Durban, the participants in this study were broadly in agreement in their views as to why the cow is avoided, giving a few reasons for this practice. These revolved around the cow as symbol, and the cow as the provider of material benefits, specifically in the form of milk and all its by-products.

Many of the participants began to explain their avoidance of the cow with a reference to its symbolism, often conveying a degree of emotional conviction as to why this should be. One participant began by saying that the cow is dear to Krishna, and that Krishna was always playing with cows. Another spoke about visiting a cow shed in India, saying "I saw the beautiful cows. It is wonderful to worship them. To feed the cow and pat it gives one a lot of auspiciousness. Just being with the cow makes one spiritual. It is because Krishna did that too".[30]

This was typical of the initial, emotional response, where people explained how they felt about the cow in terms of the myths and legends present in their beliefs. There was then a frequent follow up where more rationalised reasons were given, the most common being that the cow is the giver of milk and all its by-products, so why would one then want to kill the source of such bounty. This materialist approach, that the cow is too economically valuable to kill, was usually the one immediately expressed by the more religiously learned participants such as swamis and gurus and other community leaders, which is the approach adopted in the literature by Harris (1966), who takes a cultural materialist view.

It is interesting that what one might call the response of veneration, of felt religion, by ordinary practitioners who had not engaged in scholarly studies of their religion, preceded the materialist explanation, almost as if after expressing their deepest feelings on the subject, they then felt a need to provide more rational reasons for this most fundamental of beliefs of these observant Hindus.

Historical roots of cow veneration and inviolability

While these Hindus are deeply committed to their veneration of the cow, historically speaking this was not always so, though it must be said that it has been the case since 500 B.C. Before that, cow inviolability on was not generally practised, and there is no evidence to say exactly when the cow became a popular image in Indian traditions, stories and beliefs (Korom 2000:186).

It is revealed in Vedic literature that the ancient Indo-European Aryans who invaded India about 1500 B.C., and who contributed a great deal to the subsequent development of the Indian religion, had a special place for cattle in their lives and practices. Cattle, says W. Norman Brown (1964:245), collectively as cows, bulls, and oxen are mentioned more frequently in Vedic literature than any other class of animal, thus emphasising their importance. The cow was useful for its milk and its flesh was consumed as food: it was also useful as a service animal in agriculture and transportation (ibid.). Besides its economic importance and usefulness, cattle played a significant role in ritual performances as well. As W. Norman Brown (ibid.) has pointed out, it was the bull and the ox and the cow that were at the core of Vedic rituals, and not any other animals. Therefore as sacrificial animals they were indispensable, and their by-products of milk and ghee were offered as oblations to Vedic deities (Korom 2000:187; Brown 1964:245; Lodrick 1981).

Frank J. Korom (2000:187) tells us that in the Vedas the role of the cow in sacrifice or *yajna* was an important one. Sacrifice, he argues, played a "quintessential role in Vedic religion", and its continuation meant the maintenance of the cosmic order. Therefore the very act of creation was seen as only possible through the maintenance of the *yajna* if the balance of the world were to be maintained and not fall into a state of subsidence (ibid.). These cosmic associations contributed an important element to the eventual sanctification of the cow. But while there are these associations with the cow in Vedic religion, its inviolability and the prohibition against its consumption did not begin in this period; on the contrary, the cow was readily eaten as "consecrated beef" by the priestly class and by clerics (ibid.).

While the praises of the cow are sung in the Vedas as a "cosmic symbol, the universal mother and the source of food" (Dumont 1980:147), the doctrine of the sacred cow and its inviolability apparently gained ground gradually from about the fifth century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. during the time of religious turmoil that witnessed the birth of new religious movements.

The doctrine of ahimsa

The advent of Buddhism and Jainism marked the end of the Vedic period and ushered in a new period during which time important theoretical developments had taken place; society moved from a *varna*-based society to a caste-based one (Dumont 1970:148). The doctrine of non-violence or *ahimsa* came to prominence with the advent of these two religions in the fifth century B.C. At this

time many people renounced their worldly ties and joined Buddhist or Jain movements (Basham 1959:48-54).

Hindu Brahmans were challenged by the introduction of the new theologies presented in the doctrines of *ahimsa*, and its resultant vegetarianism, and the principles of renunciation, enshrined in Buddhist and Jain beliefs. In response to these challenges, Brahmans gave up cattle sacrifice and meat-eating in order to improve their moral and political credibility and for fear of being "outclassed" (ibid.).

The doctrine of *ahimsa*, which inferiorised beef-eating and the consumption of meat of any kind by making a "horror of meat" harmonise with ideas of impurity (Dumont 1980:194), was subsequently more widely taken up and remains in Hinduism as its most important ethical principle. Added to this were the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth (which were prevalent in late Vedic thought), and which continued until they were widely accepted in modern Hindu India (Brown 1961:430) and became fossilised in Hindu beliefs and practices in Durban. The high value originally ascribed to the cow in the Vedic period (where the cow was accorded deep respect but was also sacrificed ritually) would lead to the sanctity of the cow at the beginning of the Christian era (when the cow becomes an object of worship, its killing being considered the equal of the murder of a Brahman, and the products of the cow – milk, *ghee*, buttermilk/curd, cow dung, and urine – becoming purificatory agents) (Dumont 1980:148-150; Brown 1961:430; Srinivas 2002:183).

During the Maurya period, emperor Ashoka (304-232 BCE) became an adherent of the doctrine of *ahimsa* and made Buddhism an imperial religion by setting the example of vegetarianism by reducing the meat intake of the royal household to almost nothing (Pal 1996:54). After Ashoka's death, however, animal sacrifice returned and continued "as a popular observance" until the Indian medieval period (Korom 2000:188).

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983:4) have written that the invention of tradition is most discernible under hostile conditions. Invention, they argue, occurs most often "when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed".

However, the hypothesis presented above views the origins of the sanctity of the cow as religiously determined. It is a view many theorists hold that although the cow was revered by the ancient Vedic

people as an integral part of its ritual sacrifice and consequent consumption, the rise of Buddhism and Jainism in the seventh century B.C. gave impetus to the prohibition on the consumption of the cow (Basham 1954; Dumont 1970; Brown 1964). The attitude in these studies is that the sacredness of the cow, and its subsequent inviolability, are products of Hindu belief and practices and are the interplay of cultural, socio-religious, historical and environmental forces that have played themselves out over thousands of years. Other studies (Heston 1971; Lodrick 1979; Dandekar 1964), conducted in small scale ecological areas in India on cattle, cattle surplus, and the predominance of cow over other animals, show religion to be a major explanatory factor.

Nevertheless, the sacredness of the cow and its preference over other animals in the practice of *ahimsa*, is a very Hindu idea. While there is evidence that points to the Buddhist and Jain philosophies as having influenced the idea of the inviolability of the cow, its sacredness and association with the mother goddess originated in Vedic and post-Vedic times (Brown 1966:58). For Buddhists and Jains the killing of all animals and creatures is forbidden, whereas for Hindus the cow is given special consideration.

Marvin Harris (1966:51) has argued that an explanation of taboos, customs, and rituals associated with the management of Indian cattle should be sought in "adaptive" processes of the ecological system of which they are a part, rather than being seen as influenced by Hindu theology through the particular doctrine of *ahimsa*. Harris asks two basic questions: whether man and cattle compete for the same resources, and whether eliminating the ban on cow slaughter would "substantially modify the ecology of Indian food production". His answer to the first of these questions is that the relationship between man and cattle is symbiotic and not competitive; that these animals are indispensable work animals in India's plough agriculture; and that cows provide milk, dung for fuel, leather, and to low-caste Hindus, pagans, Christians, and Muslims, beef as food for consumption – all of which to Harris are "positive-functioned or useful". For these reasons, says Harris, one does not need to use religious concepts to explain the large number of cattle in India. For Harris, the concept of *ahimsa* is an "ideological expression" resulting from the pressures of ecology. He answers his second question saying that by eliminating the ban on cow slaughter human well-being will be threatened (Harris 1966:52-6).

However, while Marvin Harris (1966) suggests that the origins of the sacred cow lie in the economic utility of the animal, he has not taken into account the historical records on sacred-cow origins, thus attracting critics who admire his novel approach to the cow problem (Bose 1966; Klass 1966;

Mencher 1966), and critics who have refuted his hypothesis on methodological (Harris wrote his study from his anthropological chair in Columbia) and theoretical grounds (Simoons *et al*.1981; Lodrick 1979; Pal 1996; Dandekar 1969; Heston 1971).

It is difficult to give priority to one view over the other. The prohibition against the cow is saturated with symbolic and religious content, and suffused with strong emotional feelings; any attempt to contrast the symbolic with the practical and materialist reasons for the prohibition and to decide whether it is one or the other is bound to produce difficulties. For while the two arguments may appear to have merit, the answer, perhaps, lies in both. I am inclined to ask, like Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil (1997:208-9), "Do pragmatic choices and strategies give rise to prohibitions, which are then enshrined in the symbolic vocabularies of ritual, custom and religion? Or do attempts to create meaning, order and legitimacy at the symbolic level give rise to prohibitions which later have retrospective pragmatic rationalizations attached to them?"

Answers to these questions lie in the evidence I have gathered from the Hindu participants in Durban.

The cow and the participants in this study

While there are clear historical explanations as to how the principles of *ahimsa* and cow veneration become a widely accepted practice, one may ask why modern Hindus in Durban would persist with a materialist argument for these practices when such arguments can easily be demolished by pointing out that milk and all its by-products are readily obtainable from shops and supermarkets. The explanation for this adherence to materialist explanations that most readily springs to mind is that the real reason for venerating cows is a deeply felt, emotional one, passed on to these participants by their ancestors and their new religious movements, so that it is inextricably bound up and accepted as an axiom in their modern day understanding of Hinduism in Durban. However, when pressed to justify this practice, the observant Hindus feel compelled to provide a rational, readily understandable reason for those who don't share the same deep reasons of faith that the participants almost instinctively understand.

When I asked the swami, Ananda Venkatesan, from a neo-Hindu organisation, why the cow was important to him as a Hindu practitioner, his answer suggested a blend of several views that encompassed a broad view of the matter that accepts a variety of influences that have led to the

present set of beliefs; he was able to locate the origins of the prohibition on the cow to an ancient Indian civilisation, refer to its utilitarian role in agriculture and in the domestic sphere in providing milk, and place it within Hindu mythology. That the cow was originally consumed by Hindus is known and accepted by him, as well as the idea that its economic "value" and religious "sanctity" was gained over a long period of time. He also accepted the concept of *ahimsa* offered by Buddhism and Jainism has played a significant role in Hindu acceptance of non-injury to living creatures as an ethical principle and therefore contributed to making the cow inviolable. [31]

On the other hand another priest, from a Bhakti tradition, argues that there is only one reason for how the cow becomes sanctified for Hindus, by taking a purely cultural materialist approach. In doing this, Gopalan Mahadhevan is confirming the approach offered by Harris (1966) and he seems to suggest that the material and utilitarian benefits of the cow could only be taken seriously if it were made into a religious ideal.[32]

Similarly, Kovlin Raju, expanding on the material benefits of the cow and its importance in the daily economic life of Hindus, has drawn out some of the more practical uses of milk and *ghee* in the making of confection in the Hindu home, and has raised the practical issue of dung as a cleansing ingredient. The cow, he concludes, "has got to be sacred" or there would be "serious problems".[33]

For Shoba Chopra, the cow has a much more intimate and emotional connection. In the lounge-cum-dining-room of her house where we sat down to talk during the interview, the walls were covered in prints of the different scenes of Krishna as a child god, and then as a pastoralist with cows in the fields. Her domestic altar was placed in a quiet spot in the same room and on it, among other ritual vessels, was a small freesia cow. In a small and gentle voice she told me that the cow was important to her because her god, Krishna, had a special relationship with cows. All the demi-gods, she said, "are in the cow" and therefore worshipping it is "auspicious".[34]

The modern concern for the cow in Durban has deep roots which go back to its mythological associations and ritualistic functions, and as a religious symbol it cannot be ignored or taken to mean what Harris (1966:51) refers to as "irrational, non-economic, and exotic aspects of the Indian cattle complex". For many Hindus such as Shoba, the cow is associated with Krishna in his various forms as the incarnation of Vishnu, child god, the divine cowherd, and lover (Basham 1967:306-8; Simoons and Lodrick 1981:125). Krishna first appeared as a pastoralist, playing the flute and seen with milkmaids, in the Tamil anthologies in the south of India associated with a tribal fertility cult which

was taken to the north of India by nomadic tribes and herdsmen around the beginning of the Christian era (Basham 1967:308). The worship of Krishna had become firmly entrenched in the Mathura region of western Uttar Pradesh by the first century A.D., and this area has come to be associated with the birthplace of Krishna and the scenes of cow herding (ibid.) making it a sacred place for Hindu pilgrimage.

It was, however, only during the medieval period of Indian history and through the Bhakti or devotional movements that *Vaishnavism* (or the worship of Krishna as an incarnation of Vishnu) grew and became popular among Hindus (Simoons *et al*. 1981:125). The movement spread throughout much of India. The devotion to Krishna was an idea born in India and remained part of the pantheon of Hindu gods in Durban. Among many Hindus in Durban, Krishna, in the form of the cowherd god accompanied by *gopis* or milkmaids, as depicted in the larger-than-life paintings I saw on the ceilings of the Hare Krishna Temple in Chatsworth, remains a popular god in Hinduism.

It is clear that, while the Hare Krishna movement lays special emphasis on the god Krishna, other Hindus also worship Krishna. In fact, all Hindu groups acknowledge Krishna and will take seriously the association of the god with the cow.

The sentiments for the cow arising out of the mythology of Krishna is further entrenched by various major festivals observed by Krishna devotees in Durban such as *Krishna Asthmee*, which commemorates the birth of Krishna; *Holika Dahan*, which recounts the story of the death of the demoness Holika with the help of Vishnu and the ensuing celebration of the triumph of good over evil; and *Diwali*, celebrating Krishna's destruction of the demon *Naraksura*, with the essence of the commemoration being the triumph of light over darkness. These festivals are observed privately in the home with the appropriate *pujas*, and then publicly in temples for the benefit of the community. Through these different festivals, the cow is associated and linked with Krishna. The offerings of milk at the *pujas*, and the requirement that food be cooked in *ghee*, both by-products of the cow, underscore the importance of the cow and its religious role in the lives of Hindus.

In the literature, similar responses to the one given by the participant Shoba Chopra were found in Deryck O. Lodrick's (1979:242) study in the city of Varanasi, where he has shown that the cow is greatly "revered and respected" among Hindus. To the question about why the cow was revered, his participants responded: "The cow is like our mother"; and "We believe that 330 million Hindu gods live in every atom of the cow's body". These sentiments are also confirmed by Edward B. Harper

(1964:182), who reported that among the Havik Brahmins cows are said to be the gods, or that that cows have “more than a thousand gods residing in them”.

The cow has often been associated with a mother figure because it gives milk. This form of idiomatic speech, in which the cow is referred to as a symbol of embodiment and maternity, was used fairly extensively by numerous participants.[35] Norman W. Brown (1966:63-5) has alluded to the idea of the cow’s sanctity that became associated with the Great Mother or Earth goddess. The cow, says Brown, was figuratively applied to “divine feminine figures”. These divine figures had been referred to as cows so often that they were seen to be as cows. Therefore, the cow as a general zoological species became associated with worship, identified as the universal Mother, and any injury to the cow was met with serious penalties to the offender.

In summary, it is not possible to ascribe priority of one view over another; it would appear that the various approaches to understanding cow avoidance cannot be singled out as explanations for such a prohibition. Therefore, neither the symbolic and metaphorical (Tambiah 1969; Bulmer 1967; Buckser 1999; Joelle Bahloul 1995), nor the structuralist explanation explain avoidances as matter out of place causing dissonance (Douglas 1966). Similarly, the purely materialist explanation (Harris 1966) also fails to provide conclusive answers to why Hindus in Durban consider the cow to be inviolable. For, as I have shown, the answer lies in all these explanations and has deep roots in the socio-religious history of the Hindu people. However, it would seem that the religious explanation for such an avoidance, with its strong symbolic and metaphorical content, may be the more persuasive reason why Hindus in Durban will not eat the flesh of the cow. It may also explain why it has proved to be such a persistent idea; after all, if the reason had been purely materialistic or economic, would such practices not have withered in the face of modern supermarket plenty?

While the cow has been sacred among Hindus since the Vedic period, its inviolable status was a later development resulting from the influences of Buddhism and Jainism through the doctrine of *ahimsa*. This was first seen among the Brahmans as a competitive response to what was seen as a superior moral position adopted by these other two new religions. It seems that the doctrine of *ahimsa* then filtered down through the different castes until it had become widely established. However, it seems that it was left to a number of the very low castes to slaughter cows and become tanners and leather workers. This meant that they would also have continued to eat the flesh of the cow as food.

As is shown in Chapter 3, the indentured Hindus who came to Durban to work on the sugar plantations were mainly from the lower castes, drawn from a diverse section of the Indian population. It is highly likely that many of them consumed the flesh of the cow in their villages or that their occupations were based around the slaughtering of cows and working with leather, and that they would continue with these practices after relocating to Durban. For when I asked the Hindu participants in this study whether they had always avoided beef, the answer from a few was that they, and sometimes their parents and grandparents, had not always done so.

It follows from what I have been saying earlier that in the main Hindus who came to Durban were a diverse group without social and religious organisation, and that it was only through the rise of the neo-Hindu movements in Durban that their beliefs and practices become formalised and routinised. Among such practices as the establishment of communal *pujas*, and the celebration of calendar festivals under the auspices of the Hindu Maha Sabha, the neo-Hindu movements were able to consolidate certain practices such as the avoidance of the cow among many Hindus whose forebears would have eaten the flesh of the cow.

For example, Shoba Chopra was raised in a home where her parents were "religious" and "pious", and practiced a Bhakti or devotional form of Hinduism. In her childhood home she had consumed meat because she claims that her parents "didn't know". As an adult she found her religious curiosities satisfied by the Hare Krishna movement. She was also drawn to the organisation because of the emphasis it places on the cow.[36]

Similarly, Ajay Prasad was a Sanathanist Hindu before he converted to a neo-Hindu organisation and made Sai Baba his divine master. When I asked him if he had always refrained from eating beef, this is what he said:

> Yes I had beef, I had pork, I had everything and I enjoyed it. At that time, I didn't quite understand why I didn't have to eat beef, and that it was sacred and so on. Now I have the highest respect for the cow.[37]

The reaction I got from Sivan Mudaliar when I asked him if he ate beef was expressed initially with a loud laugh. As a young student who lived in the Unites States in the 70s, Sivan admits that he did eat all kinds of meat including beef. He joined a neo-Hindu movement, and subsequently became a vegetarian and has remained one for about thirty years now. However, what is interesting about

Sivan is that while he consumed all kinds of meats outside his home, he would never eat beef or cook it inside his home. After his confession of meat-eating of all kinds, he said:

> But at home, we never cooked them. You do them outside...but polonies[38] we would buy. But we wouldn't cook it in a pot. Chicken curry, mutton curry, yes. But beef curry not in the home.[39]

Joelle Bahloul (1995:485-6) in her study among the Sephardic immigrant Jews in France has raised a similar issue relating to a category of forbidden foods that are consumed particularly by young Jews who have a need to identify and integrate with mainstream French society. Meats, such as pork, which she calls "clandestine meats", do not enter the house and if they do they are cooked lightly or not at all, and would therefore not enter the house pots. Following Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Bahloul (1995:490) sees the pot as a repository of social identity and as a vessel used in culinary practice; the pot is a code which "strengthens social boundaries".

For the participant Sivan, too, eating beef in his home was not acceptable, and indeed cooking beef in the home pots was totally unacceptable. Even if the odd "clandestine" food such as polony was to enter the kitchen, it was not cooked. Of course, what Sivan points to also is that there is a hierarchy of foods, particularly regarding the flesh of animals, that may be regarded as acceptable where meat is consumed among Hindus. As M.N. Srinivas (2002:60) says, the flesh of the cow is regarded as the lowest form of food, followed by the pig, then fowl, sheep and goat. Vegetables, he argues, are ranked the highest form of food. So in keeping with this, the worst offenders in terms of the meat-eating habits of observant Hindus are the cow and the pig, while the least offending would be chickens, sheep, and goats, which are more respectable.

Vegetarianism

> Hinduism at its heart prohibits the eating of meat of any kind. The sacredness of life...is revered and so all life is revered.[40]

The belief in *ahimsa* among Hindus has naturally led to the practice of vegetarianism. The doctrine inferiorised the consumption of all animal flesh and likened the eating of meat to impurity (Dumont:194). The practice of *ahimsa* was gradually incorporated into Hindu India by making the already sanctified cow inviolable, making this a cardinal principle of Hindu beliefs and practices.

Among the Hindus who participated in this study, not all have become vegetarian; many still consume animal flesh albeit the more acceptable forms of flesh, but will consider not eating meat when it is unacceptable, such as on the day when they attend temple *pujas*, and on high festivals and for other ritual ceremonies.

Kovlin Raju, a retired professional, who has taught Hinduism as a subject at a Durban University for many years and continues to participate in conferences and workshops, as well as being a devout student of Vedanta Hinduism, is also a Hindu apologete in the community, always writing to the newspapers and defending the Hindu position where there is no clarity or there are misconceptions. Kovlin has been concerned that among some Hindus in the community, the eating of mutton and chicken still prevails. He has been pushing the Maha Sabha for a very long time now to try and get this organisation to educate Hindus and perhaps lay down vegetarianism as a rule from the top, and to try and persuade the meat-eating Hindu community to aspire to vegetarianism, as a way of controlling and keeping the purity of the Hindus in Durban. Of course, he says, the rule will be there and those who do not observe the rule will do so as a "personal and private matter". However, there are many people at the Maha Sabha who object to Kovlin's proposal.[41]

It is evident from my data that vegetarianism, as a culinary practice among observant Hindus in Durban, is fairly widespread, especially among the adherents of the neo-Hindu movements. As the swami of one of these movements in Durban says, the institution itself does not have meat, and the majority of the devotees are vegetarian. However, as a leader of such an institution, he is not prescriptive:

> We don't prescribe to them to eat beef or not to eat beef. The majority of our devotees are vegetarian. We don't interfere with their cooking pots and prescribe.[42]

The swami does admit that there is an attitude among certain people who look down on those people who eat beef, often saying that it is "the duty of Hindus not to eat cows". However, he is clear that as a neo-Hindu movement they "have put that aside" and do not "frown on people" who do consume animal flesh. He quotes (possibly loosely), Swami Ramakrishna[43]: "I prefer a man whose character is pure – he may eat pork and beef but his character must be pure – than a vegetarian who is a humbug". What the swami is saying is that the movement places emphasis on "character" and "spirituality" as being the essence of religion rather than on social taboos.

In contrast to this attitude of the swami, another movement which sits between the neo-Hindu and Sanathanist schools of Hinduism prescribes four regulative principles to its members. According to Romilla Gopinath, in the Hare Krishna movement the injunction not to consume meat is part of these principles:

> No meat eating. No illicit sex. No gambling. No intoxication.[44]

Romilla further explained to me that alliums, such as garlic and onions, are not consumed by devotees because it brings about "passion". Passion, she says is not good for a spiritual life. Similarly, meat-eating is also not good for the "passion" it stirs in humans and because it affects one's "consciousness". She argues that the correct food put into the body helps to purify the body and make one a "better person".[45]

For Vimala Devan who grew up in a very poor household and where meat was served once or twice every two months if that, she found that she did not enjoy the taste and smell of meat when it was served. Besides she did not like to "touch" and "handle" meat in its preparation for cooking as "it put her off". That made her basically a vegetarian so she found it very easy to give up eating meat completely.

Pierre Bourdieu (1986:173) has argued that what people eat must surely be linked to perceptions of self and group. Similarly, Feldman and Bauer (2009:4) argue that taste, referring to "cognitive taste as opposed to innate flavo[u]r proclivities, is relative to the culture, time and context surrounding the taster". However, Vimala seems to contradict their argument: for her it is a purely personal dislike for the taste of meat which allows her to fulfil the obligations of *ahimsa* effortlessly.

She also confesses that she would not have married her husband if he was not vegetarian, reinforcing her dislike for meat and those close to her who might consume meat. I asked Vimala what kinds of food she consumed on a daily basis as a vegetarian:

> We have *dhals* and pulses...I make *sambhar* like they do in south India or the thick dhal...We have sour milk, yoghurts and *raitas*. Yoghurt can be plain or you can add cucumber or whatever to it. We do other vegetables as well. We are rice Indians as south Indians are.[46]

While *dhals* and pulses appear to be a staple among many vegetarian Hindus, other participants include the soya bean as a replacement for animal protein. Baked goods such as cakes and biscuits are eaten provided they do not contain eggs. Sour milk is used as a replacement for eggs.[47] It is worth noting that the by-products of the cow are used extensively in vegetarian cooking either as a source of protein and as an accompaniment to the main meal, or as a replacement for eggs as in the case of sour milk.

Among Bhakti and Sanathanist schools of Hinduism, the idea of vegetarianism seems to be taking off as practitioners are made aware of the doctrine of *ahimsa* and the benefits of vegetarianism for spiritual exercises. There also seems to be a greater drive now among various Sanathanist leaders to encourage vegetarianism; a few Sanathanists who participated in this study said that they encourage those who attend services in the temple to abstain from meat-eating and other vices which are unacceptable before entering a sacred space.[48]

And as Jithesh Rao says, vegetarianism is appealing and makes him feel morally pure that he does not have to take the life of an animal in order to consume food:

> It is good to eat vegetables and to know that each time you are not having to kill an animal or shed blood when you eat. This appeals to us.[49]

Complete vegetarianism, however, is not something all Hindus in Durban are able to practice even if they are devout practitioners, such as Lutchmee Murugan. She is a religious and cultural leader who performs various priestly services but finds it very difficult to abstain from meat. She knows the religious injunctions attached to such avoidance and can quote all the aphorisms related to vegetarianism, but she says that she simply cannot give up meat-eating. Earlier in the year that I interviewed her, she told me that she had given up meat because she felt that she wanted to give thanks to god for a wonderful life, a good marriage and all other things in her life. Alas, after five months she simply "couldn't cope" and resumed eating meat.[50]

Clean

I have been arguing above that vegetarianism is regarded as the highest ideal among observant Hindus in Durban. There is another aspect of this ideal which for Hindus is very important and that is the idea of cleanness associated with vegetarianism.

In Mary Douglas' (1966:vii) understanding of food taboos among the Hebrews of the Old Testament, notably the pig, she looks at the "gestures of separation, classifying and cleansing" that accompany her theory of pollution and operate in the larger system to explain such a taboo. Douglas has argued that the pig, living or dead, is seen as dirt, which she defines as a "matter out of place" and as something that contravenes "systematic ordering" as a rejected element (ibid.:35). As such, "dirt" is not a pathogen but a symbol of dissonance.

In applying Douglas' theory of pollution to the concept of cow avoidance among Hindus in Durban, it can only be applied to the cow when it is killed, because at that point the cow becomes unclean. There is a reversal in the status of the cow, that is, between the living and the dead cow; for the cow is only seen as dirt when it is dead, but when alive it is revered and sanctified and its by-products have ritual and material benefits.

Douglas only speaks of dirt in a singular sense – she seems to say that something is dirt when it does not conform in a system – without speaking of degrees of dirt. Among the Hindus, all animals would be unclean when slaughtered for consumption but within that doctrine of *ahimsa* the cow remains as the supreme idea of dirt when consumed as food. So, the cow is a "matter out of place" when consumed as food but a matter in place when alive and conforming to the social and religious system. The cow for Hindus can, therefore, be clean or unclean depending on its status, dead or alive.

What emerges from this argument is that clean and dirt are very nuanced concepts among Hindus in Durban. While total vegetarians will call themselves clean, other Hindus who do consume some meat will also call themselves clean when they refrain from eating meat on high festival days or when they attend temple services. Clean, then, becomes associated with a particular sacred context. While clean means not eating the flesh of animals, clean for Hindus also means getting rid of bodily pathogens that symbolically separate the worshipper in order to place him in a desired state of acceptability. This subject is further discussed below under the subject of dress.

I asked the participants in this study what clean means to them. This is what they said: "Not sacrificing" is clean;[51] "...only what is pure or *sattvic* – what doesn't have to be killed – is clean";[52] "clean means...not contaminated with non-vegetable...a spiritual cleanness".[53]

Subashni Reddy, who is not a vegetarian, takes the *Parattassie* prayer for the entire month between September and October very seriously, and interprets clean in an extensive way. She has a new set of pots for cooking. Everything, she says has to be "cleaned out properly", referring to the removal of pathogens. "We wouldn't even have an egg in the fridge", she says, referring to clean here to mean non-meat foods.[54]

Perhaps Shoba Chopra gives the ultimate answer to this question by summing it up in the most concise way when she says:

> Food purifies you – you are what you eat.[55]

The social impact of proscriptions and prescriptions on the lives of observant Hindus

William Robertson Smith (1889/1907:265) has written that a sacrificial meal is a "social act" that has given prominence to certain "customs and ideas" that are associated with eating and drinking. Thus, says Smith, "those who eat and drink together are by this very act tied to one another by a bond of friendship and mutual obligation" (ibid.). While a sacrificial meal followed the ritual sacrifice of the cow as a practice among the Vedic people, this no longer persists among the Hindus in Durban. What has been taken up is the cow's inviolability in observance of the doctrine of *ahimsa*. Its inviolability, requiring that it be avoided as food, is itself a sacrifice which unites Hindus into a "bond of friendship and mutual obligation", forming a boundary around those who participate in a similar commitment to the cow.

Smith's (1889/1907) observations point to the difficulty observant Hindus have in mixing with people who do not share their practices. While this may often take the general form of socialising only within their own groups, the particular prohibition on eating beef, and in many instances a concomitant vegetarianism, pose particular barriers to mixing outside their own group.

Historically, in the structure of the caste system, for castes to remain separate units, marriage must be endogamous (Srinivas 2002:59). Separation of castes by marriage is further consolidated by taboos on food and drink. It follows, therefore, that a man will not marry a woman whose cooked food he and the rest of his household will be unable to eat (Hutton 1946:63). Therefore among

caste-conscious Hindus, perfect commensality can only be achieved when people eating together can receive cooked food and water from each other.

Ajay Prasad's family is an example of a family where all caste barriers have fallen away over the years. Ajay has a Hindi surname, but now has in his immediate family brothers-in-law with Tamil surnames. This shows that marriages have crossed the language barriers that once would have kept caste-conscious Hindus apart. Ajay says that thirty to forty years ago this would have been a problem among the different groups but now they "have a good mix" in their family.[56]

However, while the caste system no longer appears to place restrictions on who Hindus may marry in order to preserve caste identities, because the caste system has largely disappeared, there appear to be other restrictions that forbid Hindus from marrying outside their religious groupings. These relate to the proscription placed on the inviolable cow and the corresponding prescriptions that may still forbid inter-dining and inter-marriage. What is evident, also, is that among the different organisations among Hindus, there is a subtle insistence from parents that their children should marry within the fold. These and other issues are discussed below.

Sivan Mudaliar has also pointed out that young members of the Divine Life organisation are encouraged to marry within the fold by choosing suitable partners within the organisation. It is important, he argues, that there is harmony between the couple who should share the "same fundaments of a religious life". Following this, Sivan would prefer it if his own children would marry other Hindus. It is very important to him that his grandchildren are able to continue with the religion he has given his children.[57]

Similarly, Arjun Kallichuran said to me that it would be "a terrible disappointment" to him if his children married outside their religion because he is "absolutely proud of his background".[58]

Niren Singh, another participant, said that it would have been very difficult for him to have married a non-Hindu woman. And again the idea that children should continue with what their parents do is reiterated in what he says. Niren, an academic teaching Hindu scripture who is also involved in the liturgical work at his temple, says he would love to see his children continue with what he does.[59]

Among the Hare Krishna devotees, a very different phenomenon is taking place which may have replaced aspects of the caste system related to marriage. I asked the two Hare Krishna participants

in this study whether they would be upset if their children married outside the faith. One of them has a daughter who is married to a Portuguese man. I asked her what she felt about the marriage, and whether she disapproved of such a union. The fact that he was Portuguese didn't matter to her at all. What is of importance to her is that he comes from a similar tradition and that he is a "devotee". If he was Portuguese and Christian, she says, it would have "upset" her.[60]

Similarly, the other Hare Krishna participant says that inter-marriages are not seen as a "colour thing". However, she does admit that as a parent she would like to see her children stay "within the same group". While she says that it is not possible to protest about a child who marries someone outside the group, then at least an Indian should marry an Indian. However, she continues, if a man is from Moscow but has the same religious beliefs as her daughter then that will be acceptable because it will make for an easy marriage as they will have the same "understanding", referring to his beliefs and practices.[61]

For both these participants of the Hare Krishna movement, the emphasis placed on the inviolability of the cow; strict vegetarianism; prescribed food preparation such as the requirement that *ghee* be used in cooking; the injunction that all food first be offered to god before it is consumed, or *prasad*; and the application of the four regulative principles of no meat-eating, no gambling, no intoxication (which include tea, coffee, alcohol, and drugs), and no sex purely for pleasure except for procreation; together with the early morning spiritual exercises and the general activities in communal life expected of practitioners, it may be very difficult for a devotee of the movement to marry someone who is not familiar with such practices and who is outside the religious fold.

Romilla Gopinath wants her children to marry other Hindus who believe the same things and eat similar food, so that her children might "take up a spiritual life with a spiritual partner". They have to understand each other, she says. In Romilla's personal life she explained to me that not many people accept her for the religious path she has chosen because of its abstemious requirements. There are many restrictions placed on what she may eat and drink, and this therefore limits social intercourse. For example, as a member of the Hare Krishna movement she is not allowed caffeinated drinks such as tea and coffee, or alcoholic drinks, and of course there is no meat-eating. She also admits that other people have a way of "doing things" that is different from her; they cook food and eat it purely out of a "sense of gratification", while her motivation in cooking and eating is to achieve "spiritual gratification". This considerably restricts who she may eat with.[62]

There is also another point raised by the other member of the Hare Krishna movement I interviewed that further explains why it is difficult to eat with others who are different from them. Shoba says that she is very fussy about being clean. Her daily dishes are never washed in the same sink that she washes her vegetables and fruit in. Because all food is first offered to god and then consumed as *prasad*, the manner in which food is prepared is very important; everything has to be clean. Therefore sinks have to be separated for the different purposes. This therefore makes eating in other people's homes difficult as she is not sure how they do things.

Following the restriction placed on the inviolability of the cow, restrictions are placed on who Hindus will eat and drink with. In their concern to observe correct practices, Hindus place a restriction on commensality with outsiders and other Hindus who are not strict vegetarians, thereby protecting their identities. By not eating certain foods and often not being able to find food that is acceptable outside the home, restrictions are placed, too, on where observant Hindus will eat.

It would appear that among the participants I interviewed, there is a tendency to associate only with other Indians except in the workplace, where the opportunity to mix socially with others is more likely to present itself. Dinesh Dayal, for example, whose work in the Department of Education allows him to have a collegial relationship with his fellow workers, or what he calls "automatic" mixing, says he will not make a special effort to go out and mix deliberately, and this kind socialisation does not extend to the home. Dinesh also finds that living in close proximity to his place of worship, and being surrounded by other Hindus who are neighbours, is something he values. Therefore outside his work he is with his own people, which he finds easier.[63]

Hindus not only seem to have difficulties mixing with people outside the family, but it appears that there are difficulties also involved in mixing with family and having commensal relations with them when, for example, they are not vegetarian. In my interview with Arjun Kallichuran, he told me that he and his family were invited to a family party but that it would have been a little awkward for him to go because these parties generally do not cater for vegetarians. However, the hosts called him later to say that there will be appropriate food provided and that he could attend if he wished to. Arjun is aware that many of his immediate and greater family members consume meat but he says that he will not "criticise" them for eating meat nor will he "force" his beliefs on them, but it does constrain relationships.[64]

While neither Arjun's wife nor his children are vegetarian, the relationships between the family members are good, and the arrangement for his particular dietary requirements are accommodated. However, this is not prevalent in all Hindu homes I visited. Vimala Devan, for example, says that it would have been very difficult for her to have married a man who was not a vegetarian.[65] Similarly, Dinesh Dayal said to me that the culinary arrangements in his house work well, especially since his wife cooks and she is vegetarian as well, which makes catering in his family easy. For Dinesh, it is very important that his wife and family practice and believe in a similar form of Hinduism. His advice to his children would be to "select" and marry "somebody of the same religion" to make life much easier. What is important to him is that there is "no conflict of interest" and "no conflict in terms of what we have to do".[66]

Another vignette related to me showed how even within a single religious group – and indeed within the home – the consumption of beef can create dissonance. After attending a braai[67] with a prayer group, Lutchmee Murugan's husband complained that there were some people in one corner of the garden who cooked and ate beef. He was very upset about this and called it a "terrible thing". Lutchmee then confessed to me in a conspiratorial whisper: "If my husband knew I ate beef he will [sic] throw me out of the house". Lutchmee's husband was upset about the fact that some people had eaten beef on that social occasion, but also that the commensality of the group was compromised.[68]

Subashni Reddy, who has a happy Hindu home, says that she would like her twin boys to marry Hindu girls. Marrying outside the faith, she says, would cause friction, and there will not always be "an equal understanding". She further elaborates her point by telling me a story of a case of a mixed marriage in the family. Her nephew married a girl who converted to Christianity. During one of the recent prayers held at their family home, her nephew, who remains a Hindu, attended the occasion with his three children. The children, under the protection of a nanny, were forbidden to participate in the prayers while their father happily did so. To the members of the larger families present, the kids appeared to be confused because their father was able to participate while they were restrained from doing so. There is also a more serious problem, she pointed out, that those family members who are Christians and who attended these prayer functions usually arrived when the prayers were over and many would not partake of the food served. Many Hindus, such as Subashni, are offended by the behaviour of Christians and the lack of sensitivity towards their religion.[69]

Clearly, her practical example shows that if people of mixed religious beliefs marry, they would have to arrange beforehand what the religious persuasion of the children would be. However, this may not solve the problem in this particular case, but clearly points to the complexities involved in religiously plural marriages. Relationships between people of other religious persuasions and Hindus also become strained.

Are there sanctions for Hindus who eat the flesh of the cow?

> There is no rule in any scripture that says if you don't practise Hinduism the way it has been in the Bhagavad Gita you are going to be punished and you are going to end up in hell.[70]

Unlike the commandments in Christianity or the five pillars of Islam, Hinduism does not have rules with set injunctions by which its adherents live. If one were therefore to ask whether there are sanctions for eating a forbidden food for Hindus, the answer would probably be no. However, Hindu law, according to one participant, is based on *karma,* the doctrine which states that one's actions and intensions in a given lifetime will be rewarded or punished accordingly in future lives. It is wrong, he argues, to contribute to the "death of another being" – an action that would count negatively against a Hindu and his future existences.[71]

Clearly, then, the decision whether to eat or not to eat the flesh of animals is a purely personal matter. So while there is no direct sanction against eating the flesh of the cow, its inviolability remains so that eating it is the most negative action in terms of the law of *karma*.

Nevertheless, it is evident from the discussion above that not all Hindus are vegetarian, and therefore do not strictly follow the doctrine of *ahimsa*, the principle of non-injury to all animals. Some people found it easy to accept vegetarianism as a religious practice following the religious injunction. Some others, who were not always vegetarian and even confessed that they used to consume the flesh of the cow and other animals lower down the hierarchy of flesh forbidden for consumption, became vegetarian upon converting to one of the neo-Hindu movements. Among the many families I visited, sometimes only one person would be vegetarian. Arjun Kallichuran is a case in point.[72]

It is evident that many people removed animal flesh from their diets and became vegetarian in response to their conversions to one of the neo-Hindu movements. However, within these movements, there are worshippers who still consume meat but would not consume the flesh of the cow, which is regarded as the ultimate forbidden food. It was also evident that there are some people who will consume animal flesh but never on the days they attend temple or participate in a *puja*, or during festivals or during the prescribed number of days they must fast before a *hawan*.

While vegetarianism is an institutional matter among the neo-Hindu groups, meaning that the pots of the temple are indisputably vegetarian, the pots of individuals in the privacy of their homes may not necessarily be vegetarian. The clergy and spiritual directors of the neo-Hindu movements who participated in this study said that members are aware of the institutional vegetarianism, and are also made aware that the cow is inviolable as part of Hindu belief. While these leaders do everything to encourage vegetarianism among their members, they won't interfere with their cooking pots at home. In other words, the prohibition against eating animal flesh only applies at the communal level, which is a necessary element in maintaining an identity in the neo-Hindu community.

The idea of individuals and families taking up vegetarianism as a practice is a purely personal matter, and it does not matter when the individual becomes vegetarian as a Hindu. There are no direct sanctions if the flesh of the cow or any other animal is consumed; it all boils down to having a conscience about the killing of animals and the effect this has on the Hindu person's future life.

Festivals

It was not until the turn of the twentieth century when Hindu missionaries began arriving in Durban that the form and content of Hindu practices, notably festivals, would be properly installed and reconstructed through their proselytising activities. Together with this, the formation of the Hindu Maha Sabha in 1912 has been a catalyst around which the official Hindu religion is formed.
The Maha Sabha, and the neo-Hindu movements in Durban, have each contributed to the organisation, management, and standardising of festivals that have become a maker of Hindu unity, presence and identity.

Following the calendar based on the solar cycle as it happens in India, Hindus are able to maintain a spiritual and emotional contact with the motherland and continue practices that began with their forebears, thus linking lineages, mythologies, and traditions. As Niren Singh has said, the dates are

chosen for their repetition in the cycle as they are given "in the scriptures". What is important is that the great events, such as the birth of Krishna, are reproduced at the similar time that they occurred in the historical myths, allowing Hindus in Durban to keep and continue the practices at the same time.[73]

The emphasis on doing things at the same calendar time as the Hindus in India, which Niren has alluded to, is underscored by Pratap Kumar (2000:59), who has pointed out that among the Durban Hindus the emphasis in keeping these calendar festivals is not on correct time but on the correct practice of their observance.

In Durban, Hindu festivals reflect the linguistic group of the observer. The major festivals also reflect the different deities or gods, each having a pre-ordained day or month in the calendar celebrations. There are major festivals and minor ones, and there are religious days as well as religious nights that mark a particular deity or religious event. Birthdays of deities, and victories and triumphs of the gods over evil or demonic forces in mythologies, are noted in the calendar and celebrated. Whether solemn or convivial, what the celebration of these festivals shows is that there are many gods, goddesses, and deities that Hindus revere and acknowledge; that ancestors are important and therefore memorialised through special observance; that some days and some clock times are auspicious while others are not; and that feasting in the celebration of a festival is often preceded by fasting.

The religious year for observant Hindus in Durban begins with *Thai Pongol* in January. This is a harvest festival associated with the agrarian economy of India. The festival has continued in Durban and is a time of joy, happiness and renewal. Milk is usually ritually boiled in a new pot until it overflows, symbolising abundance and prosperity.

The participants of two families I interviewed said that the *Kavadi* festivals were important in their calendar observances and are noted in their own calendars issued by the local temple.[74] There are two *kavadies*: *Thaipoosam Kavadi* in the Tamil month of *Thai*, between January-February, and the second *Kavadi* or *Chitraparvam Kavadi* in the Tamil month of *Chitray*, which is between April-May. These festivals are held in honour of Muruga, Shiva's son, who is believed to have great powers to heal and to dispel misfortune (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:42). The *kavadis* or decorated frames are carried by the devotees, usually to honour a vow made. This is a popular festival among south Indian Hindus in Durban who are Tamil- and Telegu-speaking.

Sometime between February and March is *Shivarathri*. This festival takes the form of fasting and an all-night prayer vigil honouring Shiva, on the thirteenth or sometimes fourteenth lunar day in the dark fortnight of the waning moon. This is a widely observed festival among Hindus in Durban, being popular among all the language groups.

One participant said that his family, and indeed the entire group in the temple he worships at, will participate in *Shivarathri,* as well as the festivals mentioned below.[75] *Holika Dahan* is observed during February-March and recounts the story of Holika, a demoness in Hindu mythology who was burnt to death with the help of the god Vishnu; it is a popular festival among Hindi-speaking Hindus in Durban. It is a joyous festival celebrating the victory of good over evil. During the months of April and May, *Ramanavami*, or the birth of Rama, hero of the epic Ramayana, is commemorated. At this festival, relevant portions of scripture are read and expounded.

Between July and August is a period of inauspiciousness, the month of *Adi*, where no important matters – business, social, or domestic – are transacted. During the "nine nights" festival or *Navaratri*, from September to October, Hindus honour the divine mother in her various manifestations as Durga, Lakshmi, and Sarasvati, allocating three days each for the different aspects of the goddess. The form taken by this festival also incorporates recitation from scripture, discourses, and *puja*.

The period between August and November brings in the following celebrations and observations for many Hindus in Durban: *Krishna Asthmee*, the birth of Krishna[76]; *Ganesh Sadurti*, the birth of Ganesha; and *Pitar Paksh*, a period of fasts and prayers offered in remembrance of dead ancestors, in which the annual Vedic *sraddha* ceremonies are performed, mainly among Hindi speaking Hindus:

> We observe fasts. We get up early in the morning and we bath and then we offer water to our late ones. It is actually a memorial service.[77]

When the moon is completely overshadowed by the sun and when the sun enters *Kanya*, the months between September and October, Tamil Hindus observe *Parattassi* for a whole month, during which rituals of food are offered to the dead ancestors. Complete vegetarianism is observed during this time.

For Subashni Reddy, *Parattassi* is a very important festival and the only other festival she will commemorate apart from the *Kavady* festivals. Being the only festivals she has singled out to keep in her own home following the practices of her parents, she takes the observation of *Parattassi* very seriously. She recalls that when her mother got married, an entire set of *Paratassie* cooking pots were handed to her as a present. In her own home, *Subashni* has a set of pots, pans, flatware, crockery and kitchen cloths, which are put away and brought out and used only for this particular ritual observance. "My dad was very, very strict about *Paratassie*", she says, and "we had to do it whether we liked it or not", recalling parental injunctions in her childhood. During this observance everything is "cleaned out properly" and there "wouldn't even be an egg in the fridge".[78]

Other festivals, which participants noted as festivals that are celebrated, include *Katha*. This festival may be undertaken at any time of the year that is appropriate for the practitioner, and is conducted in the home. It is the recitation of the sacred narrative about the Lord Satyanarayana, and is closely connected to *Jhanda,*[79] which literally means flag. The flags are attached to long bamboo poles. These *jhandas*, which have a pronounced visibility, are erected on a consecrated section of the front lawns of many Hindu homes I visited. The *jhanda* represents Hanuman, the monkey god, who is associated with the worship of Rama.

Divali

Every Hindu who participated in this study celebrated *Divali,*[80] or *Diwali*, as it is referred to in Durban. It is the most popular festival of renewal among Hindus, irrespective of their linguistic differences. The mythologies surrounding this festival seem to present all these groups with a meaningful story that gives everyone a reason to commemorate this festival.

The earliest request for *Divali* to be recognised as a holiday for Hindus in Durban began with the reforms of Swami Shankeranand, who asked for the festival to be instituted as an official Hindu practice in 1909. The 12th of November was subsequently declared as the day to celebrate this festival (Vahed 2002:91). However, this was not firmly established until the formation of the Hindu Maha Sabha in 1912, which continued with the agenda set by reformers such as Swami Shankeranand to eventually establish *Divali* as an important Hindu calendar practice that would unify all Hindus in Durban.

The Maha Sabha today boasts that it is involved in one of the biggest festivals in the country; *Divali* has become a national event bringing together all Hindus of diverse backgrounds. In the past, says the head of the Maha Sabha, the celebration of *Divali* was "somewhat fragmented" but now "over half a million people" attend the festival making it the "biggest celebration in the country".[81]

There are many myths and legends associated with the origins of the festival of *Divali*. Among Hindus in Durban the most popular explanations for this festival are that they celebrate triumphs and unions such as the return of Rama (the hero of the *Ramanaya*) and Sita to Ayodhya[82] after fourteen years of exile; the marriage of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, to Vishnu; and Krishna's destruction of the demon Narakasura. The essence of this festival is the celebration of the triumph of light over darkness. However, Hindus, depending on their linguistic background, will select any one of these mythological reasons to celebrate *Divali*.

This is an extremely auspicious time for Hindus, and it is celebrated with much enthusiasm both privately and publicly. Homes are cleaned, brass is polished, cobwebs dusted, and all dark spots are illuminated with oil lamps and electric lights.[83] Indian delicacies are made and distributed to friends and family. Like other festivals mentioned above, there are special foods associated with *Divali*, and these are dutifully made year after year.

While *Divali* has captured the national imaginations of Hindus, it has become a very special event for children growing up in Hindu homes. Children look forward to the celebration and anticipate the ceremonial massaging of oil on their heads before taking a bath on *Divali* morning, putting on new clothes bought for the occasion, celebrating the special *puja* in the home, the handing out of food gifts to friends and neighbours, and then the evening celebrations associated with the lighting of lamps. These rituals are very important to children, and they are rehearsed and acted out year after year, and are remembered and continued when the children have grown and become adults. Vimala Devan, who is of south Indian origin, has perhaps captured the essence of why it is that practice in festivals such as *Divali* is so important to children when she said:

> Rituals are important when you have small children...they need that support and example...it is better that they see what is being done. And they will remember later...you can keep telling, keep telling that the god is there but if you don't get them to do things they will not remember. You know, the new clothes for *Diwali*, the sweetmeats; it is all part of the thing. Among the south Indians...you get up before sunrise, have oil rubbed on the hair

> before bath...Most of the time we do what our parents do. Later on when we intellectualise it we say oh, that's why we do it.[84]

In summary, it is clear from what has been said above that *Divali* and other festivals were not important festivals to the early indentured Hindu labourers, but by the early twentieth century *Divali*, and eventually all festivals, became part of the calendar practices that would gain popularity as community celebrations among the Hindus in Durban. The emphasis placed on correct practice of festivals as they occur in the motherland is very important for Hindus in Durban in their continuity of the practice of festivals.

Food and festival

In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen (1953:65) saw food and drink as a means of conspicuous consumption. Festive gatherings, he argued, originated in motives of "conviviality and religion" but now also serve an "invidious" purpose. Although Veblen does recognise that there was a religious reason for the celebration of festivals, what I found among the Hindus in Durban is that this reason remains dominant and has not given way to the display of conspicuous consumption. In fact, there has been a cutting back on expenses at festivals and serious consideration given to health issues, as will be discussed below. However, this is not to say that there is no escalation of food both in quantity and variety for special festivals.

It was evident among the participants that when we spoke about festivals, the food associated with the festivals was automatically raised. This gave rise to the aphorism, "Tell me the festival and I'll tell you the food". Food at these festivals may be viewed as culinary mementos that are made every year and every participant knows which foods are associated with which festival in an automatic way. For Gopalan Mahadhevan, food has always been important to Hindus at festivals because "food is important for life". Food is offered to the gods and then eaten as *prasad*.[85]

Although offerings of food are made daily in the temple, for Romilla Gopinath, food at festivals goes beyond the ordinary and everyday practice of offerings. On festival days they prepare "extra-ordinary" foods which go beyond the daily fare in quantity and variety in order to make "big" offerings. The god, especially on its birthday, is anthropomorphised by getting new clothing and a greater offering of food to mark the celebration.[86]

Almost every festival has specific foods that would be present on these occasions, although the items of food on the offering tray presented for a small *puja* in the home or a bigger offering at temple will usually always consist of the ubiquitous milk and fruit. More elaborate offerings consist of a great many varieties of fruit, white rice cooked in sugar, milk and *ghee*, or a *halwa* made of cream of wheat, *soji*, and savoury chick peas.

Some festivals require prescribed food. At the festival celebrating the birth of *Ganesha*, for example, *ludoo*, a rich, ball-shaped confection made of *ghee*, chickpea flour or semolina, sugar, coconut, and spices, is offered to the birthday god as is insisted upon in the religious text, the *Puranas*. First, says Arjun, the *puja* must be performed in the home with one batch of *ludoos*, and then another batch, which has not already been offered, is taken to the temple to make separate offerings there.[87]

At the *Jhanda* festival in honour of Hanuman, *rhot,*[88] a disk shaped cake made from flour, sugar, cardamom, and only *ghee* made from cow's milk as no substitutes will do, is also fried in *ghee*.[89] These cakes, which are mandatory at this festival, are called *prasad* because they are offered to the god first at the *puja*, and then consumed by the worshippers.

If there is perhaps one thing that captures the Hindu culinary metaphor at festivals, it must be sweetmeats, or more correctly *mithai,* and perhaps at no festival are these sweetmeats made in greater abundance and variety than at the festival of *Divali*. Their main function is firstly to grace the offering trays at the *Divali puja*, and then they are consumed as snacks or confectionary. These sweetmeats are made a week or two before the festival starts, as there are many to make and they are time consuming to prepare. It is common practice among Hindus to drop off a platter of *mithai* and savouries with neighbours, friends and family, as gifts in celebration, as Rajesh Kumar confirms:

> We always put what we have cooked on a nice tray and present it well...we will hand these out to close neighbours and friends. In return they will also do the same thing.[90]

However, festivals repeat themselves year after year by their unchanging eternal return, but the contexts in which they are reproduced and re-enacted seem to change. The festivals which are repeated as calendar times are out of sync with every-day time. During festivals normal time and normal work ceases, to accommodate excessive eating or complete abstinence from food. Nevertheless, daily matters can intrude and this can change the way festivals are observed. Everyday

matters such as health, finances, and time become practical considerations in the production and re-enactment of festivals.

Vimala Devan, for example, is aware of the demands of the festival of *Divali* in terms of the vast quantities of food and the desired balance to be created between sweet and savoury, and the giving of food gifts to family, friends and neighbours, which not only becomes expensive and labour intensive to produce, but places an enormous strain on the body, especially if one is diabetic, since these kinds of festival foods are rich in butter, sugar, and other ingredients which are now considered unhealthy. “What is the point”, she laments, “we can’t eat too much sweet now”. Earlier in her life, as a young daughter-in-law, she recalls going the whole nine yards in her preparation of food at festivals when she would have had to impress her mother-in-law, other family, and friends. She also raises a practical consideration about the fact that these festival foods are usually distributed to other Hindus who may themselves be preparing such food, which makes the gift of food redundant, and it is therefore more sensible to give away its value in money to charity.[91] Now she prepares only a few savouries and buys in small quantities of sweetmeats for her *Divali* offerings and personal consumption.[92]

Festival food clearly goes beyond the requirements of daily fare, which provides members of a household with food for nutrition; it is about making celebratory food, going beyond common-sense nutrition, and meeting expectations by doing whatever it takes to fulfil obligations to family and community for the maintenance of correct practice.

There are other considerations too, and they include, among others, that festivals and religious occasions among Hindus require the preparation of specific foods, often for a weekday ritual, which appear to be very time consuming. Arjun Kallichuran, who tries to observe most of the calendar festivals, told me that he and his wife hold full-time employment and it is very difficult for his wife to come home and prepare the requisite food for offering (referring to the confection) at the temple that same evening. What they have resorted to is buying in the confection from a reputable local confectioner, or *halwai*, who, in consideration of Hindus, will supply those who are preparing to celebrate with their specific food requirements and who will, they know with confidence, only prepare the confection with the prescribed pure butter or *ghee*. While this takes away the pressure of having to make the confection from scratch, and gives the *halwai* merchants good business, the emotional association of food with the familial mothers and grandmothers and the recipes handed to their daughters, is missing.

Arjun says that the culinary skills that mothers had are often not continued by modern Indian women. However, he does not see this as a negative trait, for there is a trade off; he has gained a second income in their home and they are able to enjoy a certain standard of living because his wife works.[93]

More Hindu women have entered the work force in Durban, and expectations of a women's role in the Hindu home are beginning to shift; there have been signs of men sharing the cooking with their wives, and helping with the shopping and general housekeeping. There are, however, still some men who remain resistant, and they can afford to, especially as the traditional set-up is still prevalent in their homes, where mother and daughter-in-law share the cooking duties and other chores.[94]

The purchasing of food for convenience is a good example of the changing attitudes to food and ritual in contemporary Durban, and the dissonance between the need for the exact reproduction and continuity of festivals and other important calendar customs, and the demands and pressures of everyday life.

Ablution and Clothes

Bath before temple and clean clothes

Purity in body is an indispensable requirement to any Hindu who approaches the gods or holy things. Cleansing the body is a requirement which implies the belief that the pure is suitable and the unclean or the impure is unsuitable to approach the holy. This, in "anthropomorphic theism" (Stukey 1936:289) suggests that clean and pure is pleasing and dirty and impure is displeasing to the gods. The cleansing of Hindus before entering the temple or approaching their god at a home altar is not simply an act of cleaning to remove dirt but also cleaning in the sense to symbolically remove the Hindu preparing to worship from his impure environment.

Bathing then is a prologue to ritual and suggests that a requisite cleaning rite takes place to make the worshipper fit to enter a sacred space to beseech the gods. A cleansed participant, for example, proceeds straight to the temple or place of worship without stopping anywhere on his journey which may pollute his cleansed person. The purifying of the body extends to abstaining from sexual intercourse for a determined period of time prior to entering the temple, and not eating certain

proscribed foods. Those Hindus who do consume meat are generally vegetarian on the day they go to the temple. Purity, then, is associated with whiteness – the absence of corporeal dirt, and the absence of any behaviour and thing that would be considered improper in approaching the gods.

The freshly bathed potential worshipper completes the purification process by putting on fresh clothes. However, it is not just fresh clothes, but appropriate clothing, to approach the sacred and conform to the expectations of the other worshippers who are present.

Although anthropologists in the second half of the nineteenth century had already begun making statements about dress as seen in Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of Sociology* (1879), Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), and Edward B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), these works explained the variations of dress from the point of view found in theories of social evolution. Social anthropologists of the twentieth century, who grew increasingly disillusioned with such theories, especially regarding the speculative nature concerning the origins of human behaviour, questioned the way in which the facts were collected to support their theories.

One such anthropologist who questioned this approach and who gave the subject of dress very serious attention was Ernest Crawley. While Crawley's (1931:2) work on dress is written using the old method of constructing a framework that draws from scattered evidence collected from all over the world, his attempt to move away from the evolutionary approach is evidenced by his reservation about "the genesis of dress" which he considered to be highly conjecturable. It is also evident from his work that there is an unwillingness to use the doctrine of survivals – as was applied by Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1871) – in his interpretation of dress. The functions of clothing, according to Crawley (ibid.:6-13), encompass ornament, concealment, decoration and protection. However, Crawley (ibid.:70-1) went beyond these seemingly obvious reasons for dress to interpret them as notions of purity and danger among various religious groups, showing the parallel between cleansed body and cleansed clothes while maintaining the principle that "solemnity in dress must accompany solemnity of circumstance and function". And it would appear from Crawley's facts that various religious people maintain such a custom.[95] Whether the new state, says Crawley (ibid.:71), "is the extraordinary state of sacredness or the ordinary state of common life, adaptation to it equally involves change of assimilative costume, preceded by removal of that previously worn".

There seems to be a difference between clothes used to cover the body and clothes used for a particular purpose. The subject of dress also appears to fall under a wide range of terms such as

clothing, costume, ornament, apparel, and garment, among others, to refer to anything that covers, protects, adorns, and decorates the body. However, it was François Boucher (1967:9) who distinguished between clothing and costume by suggesting that the former serves to cover the body while the latter suggests "the choice of a particular form of garment for a particular use". The term clothing, for Boucher, "depends primarily on such physical conditions as climate, health, and on textile manufacture" (ibid.). He further explains costume as a set of clothes that goes beyond utility and denotes activity, taste, and rank reflecting "...social factors such as religious beliefs, magic, aesthetics, personal status, the wish to be distinguished from or to emulate one's fellows" (ibid.).

If, as Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins (1992:8) claim, that "dress is a powerful means of communication", what is being communicated when Hindus have certain restrictions and prescriptions placed on their clothing, style, colour and material? O.P. Joshi (1992:214) has written that the primary factors underlining the dress of both Hindu men and women are the concepts of purity and pollution. It would appear that for Hindus this concept is applied to everything that is in existence and among other things, includes bodily functions, food, dress, objects, animals, places and times (Joshi 1992:215). Dress, therefore, among the Hindus of Durban is not a social phenomenon that can be discussed only within a particular social system because it is intimately related to the larger Hindu religious system. The idea of the sacred and concepts of purity and pollution divide everything into pure and impure. According to Joshi (ibid.) these beliefs are sometimes anchored in the sacred texts, while some distinctions are made on the basis of traditional wisdom transmitted from generation to generation. It would appear from what Joshi (ibid.) is saying that all activities such as bathing, praying, the singing of devotional songs, rituals, pilgrimages, meditating, and other religious observances, are prescribed to purify "man's faculties and nature" and these activities are performed to make a person pure and sacred.

The clothes worn by Hindus may be characterised by an "ideological distinction" between a stitched garment and an unstitched one. Stitched garments refer to those garments that have been cut and sewn to fit the body. An example of an unstitched garment is the sari which is cut to measure four, five, or nine meters of cloth and is unstitched (ibid., f.n.2:228). While stitched garments are worn by "many educated and Western-orientated women" in colleges, schools and offices, the traditional sari is regarded as a correct form of dress on all social occasions of importance such as festivals, ceremonies and pilgrimages (ibid.:214). Among the Hindu women in Durban too, the sari appears to be the prescribed dress for ritual and special occasions. As Vishen Shah says, the "standard rule" for women is the sari which is considered "an important and respectable way of conducting oneself".[96]

Hindu women's clothing generally in Durban has evolved in its contact with Western culture and this is reflected in the cut and stitched garments that they generally wear, as opposed to the unstitched sari which remains as a cultural "survival" following Tylor's (1871) evolutionary doctrine. Or is the sari simply a form of fossilised fashion that has persisted in the Hindu diaspora in Durban?

The Indian sari accommodates all types of bodies and shapes, and is ageless and apparently comfortable to touch and for movement. They range from simple cotton to extremely ornate silks and brocades. Wearing the sari in the temple captures the heritage of the Hindus and acts as an important regulator and means of expression within the community. It is also a form of dress that identifies the wearer with a specific place of origin and links her to ancestors who have worn similar dress. However, in India, the *grhyasutras* written in the fifth century B.C. about daily observances and rites of passage mention, among other things, that only unstitched garments should be worn and should only be made from pure fabric such as silk, and that the colour black is never to be worn. Silk, apparently, is a least-pollutable fabric which may be purified by sprinkling a few drops of water on it.[97] Although cotton is prescribed as a ritual fabric for dress, it may only be purified by washing it in water (Joshi 1992:216-7). However, while silk and cotton are freely available in the land of India, Hindu women may not always be able to find these fabrics in Durban, where synthetic textiles have become popular.

One participant who wore a sari every day of her life while she taught at a school says that she would "never step out of the house without Indian clothes". A sari, she say, "doesn't go out of fashion. You can always bring it out a few years later and wear it again". However, she laments: "Where is the pure silk and the pure cotton?"[98]

Another form of dress that is popular among Hindu women is the *salwar* and *kurta,* commonly called the Punjabi suit, which was probably introduced to India by the Muslim invaders and migrant groups in India from about the eleventh century (Joshi 1992:219). These garments have become acceptable as garments for ritual purposes even though they are considered to be characteristic of what constitutes stitched garments.

Rules regarding dress at temples

According to the swami of a neo-Hindu movement in Phoenix, Durban, they do not have rules written down about how people should behave or be dressed when attending worship at the temple. He seems to suggest that people generally know that when they go to a temple, "they have a bath and dress in simple clothes". They also know not to go dressed in "gaudy clothes".[99]

Ananda Venkatesan also appears to be saying that those who enter a sacred space must consider others who enter that space as well. Those who enter the temple must bear in mind that there are different sexes present, old people, young people, and monks, in the presence of whom there should be appropriate dress. As the swami says, who dresses in a saffron robe distinguishing him from the other mere practitioners present at the temple: "Dress code simply means that we are not islands unto ourselves; we are interconnected with everybody else. So, if we are coming to a public place, some social order is to be maintained". [100]

There is a certain uniformity of dress and behaviour when a group of Hindus gather to worship. Erving Goffman (1951:300) has called this kind of regulative mechanism "socialization restrictions" and they function as "symbols of membership". He says that these are "acts which impress others" and they involve behaviours such as "etiquette, dress, and deportment" among other forms of behaviour.

In regulating institutional behaviour and having restrictions placed on the participants the issues of inclusion and exclusion are raised among the group of worshippers. According to Arjun Kallichuran, the rules of the temple he attends are clear to its members: "You should have a bath before coming in to the temple and put on clean clothes. You should have not eaten meat at least for that day. You must dress in a certain way". By accepting these rules, he goes on to say, the worshipper has accepted to "include" herself by being part of the group. Conversely, those who choose not to obey the rules of the temple have excluded themselves from that social order.[101] In other words, a person, by her own doing, can exclude herself from the worshipping community by not following the rules set. Obeying the rules, such as the dress code, includes the worshiper, while disobeying the rules excludes them.

In Barnes and Eicher's (1992:1) framework on the social aspects of dress, dress is defined as a communication code with meaning. As a cultural phenomenon, dress has several essential

attributes. A person's identity "is defined geographically and historically, and the individual is linked to a specific community". Dress, they argue, "serves as a sign that the individual belongs to a certain group, but simultaneously differentiates the same individual from all others: it includes and it excludes" (Barnes and Eicher 1992:1). Therefore, for Barnes and Eicher (ibid.:2) the social identity which is exhibited in dress becomes not only an answer to the question of "*who* one is, but *how* one is", corresponding with the definition of self in relation to a moral and religious value system.

Sivan Mudaliar, a devout Hindu who is involved in various leadership positions at his temple, talks about the need to be clean – cleansed of dirt and dressed in clean clothes – as being the requisite prescription for participating in a *puja*. When I interviewed him at his home he was dressed in civilian clothes of slacks and sweater. When telling me how one should be dressed to take part in a ritual, he pointed to himself as being inappropriately dressed. However, taking a bath and donning clean clothes are only part of the ritual prescriptions for purity when entering a temple; the other prescriptions include the avoidance of meat and abstinence from sex. A cleansed worshipper, he says, should also proceed "straight" to the temple and not stop on her way there. This ensures the preservation of the pureness of clothes and body.[102]

Dress for concealment and covering

It is evident from the data that observant Hindu participants wear clothes to cover and conceal their bodies appropriately before entering a sacred space, which may for Hindus be a hall or temple where worship is conducted.

Dressing for temple or the entry into a sacred space is a form of activity that requires the worshipper to be dressed accordingly, to fit the part. Ajun Kallichuran's uncle, who was a priest, used to say that just as you will not find a man dressed in a three-piece-suit working in his garden, similarly, one has to dress "appropriately" for temple. Putting on the correct clothing, he argues, creates the "desired mood" without causing "disruption". Jeans and shorts, for example, are not conducive to the "spiritual" atmosphere they aspire to create in the temple.[103]

Lutchmee Murugan seems to thinks that an exposed body draws attention to the person; plunging necklines and sleeveless clothes "attract attention" to the wearer. She argues for sameness in dress to create "oneness" within the group.[104]

What seems to be revealed in the data on clothes and dress is that the wearer, particularly among women, often reflects the style of clothes worn by her ancestors, the regions in India where they would have come from, and the religious persuasion of the wearer. Romilla, for example, is a disciple from the Hare Krishna movement and the clothes she wears to the temple reflects the geographical origins of her ancestors who probably came from the north of India. She wears a Punjabi or *gopi* outfit, as well as a sari, which are items of clothing prevalent in the north of India. Clothes for women, such as slacks and cropped tops are regarded with disdain and considered to be disrespectful for temple use. The women in their temple also cover their heads.[105]

Wearing Western clothes is frequently mentioned as a sign of "disrespect" when worn in the sacred space of Hindus.[106] Wearing the correct clothing appropriate to the culture of the Hindus constitutes respect and a sign of order in the temple. It also reflects positively and connects the wearer with ancient traditions and customs creating an atmosphere that is in keeping with the religious beliefs and practices of Hindus. As Rajesh Kumar says, "We put on a *kurtha*...something traditional when we go to the temple. We don't allow western clothes".[107]

However, it is not always clear that dress is for concealment and covering when entering a sacred space. There was also the element of conspicuous dress and the effects that the wearer of such finery could produce on other worshippers. For the guru, Gopalan Mahadhevan, at the temple in Greenwood Park, it was very important for the practitioners to attend wearing the correct clothes. Unlike some other religions, he says, Hindus are separated from them by the maintenance of their customary dress. However, while the Bhakti traditions of this particular temple do not have a uniformity of dress and a prescribed colour, they are nevertheless clad in the appropriate dress for worship, that is in saris and Punjabi suits. What the guru seems to want is for women, particularly, not to attend with very ornate clothes while others may be very simply dressed. This, he says, may distract the worshipper who will then not be able to "concentrate on god". In comparing the traditions of his temple with those of the neo-Hindu movements such as the Sai Baba organisation and Divine Life, Gopalan is aware that the followers of these traditions prescribe "white cloth as a symbol of purity and sameness" and is willing to mandate a form of dress borrowing the principle from other Hindu organisations for his congregants to adopt.[108]

The need to create a place conducive to worship means that worshippers must dress appropriately, in accordance with the rules of the temple or organisation, and this will entail wearing the correct garment for the occasion. It is evident that clothes worn in the setting of the temple should conceal

the body to convey a certain modesty. However, approaching the sacred in a temple setting also means that there would be other worshippers present, both male and female. How worshippers conduct themselves in such an environment has been controlled and arranged in a manner that will avoid any kind of behaviour that will be considered as misrepresentative of the atmosphere that is being created. Among many Hindus in this study, there were certain thoughts that are regarded as "base thoughts", and they point to the cardinal sins of lust, anger, greed, and envy. The most grievous of these is lust.

To avoid such unwelcome emotions and thoughts occurring in a sacred space, Hindu worshippers are separated in the temple; the women sit on one side and the men on the other with an aisle dividing them. This is the principle but it does not always exist in practice; apparently there are some couples who refuse to be separated inside the temple. This may only be a problem sometimes; the service I attended showed quite visibly that the men and the women sat in their designated spaces. The problem, says Sivan, "is that we are human beings and as human beings we still have our senses fully alive". Having one's senses used for purposes that are considered impure and polluting does not assist the worshipper to attain his full spiritual goal. Therefore, he warns, that a worshipper should try to "keep his thoughts as pure as possible".[109]

In the methodology section in Chapter 1, I recounted extensively my own dilemma and predicament about the clothing I should wear to the various Hindu functions I attended. My feeling was that I was going as an outsider and I didn't have to worry too much about fitting in because I wasn't an insider, yet the Hindus who invited me to various functions seemed very concerned that I should fit in. Naturally, I wasn't going to dress inappropriately, but because of this I bought two Punjabi suits – one for a simple daily *puja*, and the other for more elaborate festivals. This accords with Hilda Kuper's (1973:359-61) own account of how her clothing became an issue when she was studying Swazi culture, and attended independence day celebrations. This led her to recount her experience on this occasion with extensive detail, to make the point about the importance and significance of her wearing the correct clothes, not to satisfy her own need to wear these clothes, but to satisfy the needs of her hosts and the community.

The use of colour in Hindu organisations

White is the standard colour that the neo-Hindu practitioners adopt for their dress in their temple gatherings whether it is a big festival or a small *puja*. There was one possible answer about why

white is chosen, relating to Hindus in their historical context as was pointed out by Vishen Shah: "White was the colour worn in India because of the heat and it could have become part of the cultural patterning"[110] that was continued by Hindus outside India.

Donald A. MacKenzie (1922:143) writing of colour symbolism as a line of anthropological research has evidence from the Hindu religious text, the Mahabharata, that points to the significance of the different colours:

> Six colours of living creatures are of principal importance, black, dusky, and blue which lies between them; then red is more tolerable, yellow is happiness, and white is extreme happiness. White is perfect, being exempted from stain, sorrow and exhaustion...black is bad.

The colour of dress, therefore, carries symbolic information and meanings for the participants. In the neo-Hindu organisations white seems to be the preferred colour as it is associated with purity and cleanliness. Dark colours seem to be discordant with the softness and pureness of white clothes in the atmosphere of the temple. If everyone, says Ajay Prasad, is in white, "then the concept of oneness starts to develop". If one wears orange, another black, and yet another red, it alters the focus of the mind.[111]

Another participant of another neo-Hindu movement confirms that there is a definite uniformity and homogeneity created through the dress code of the institution but is happy to conform for the creation of an ideal space in the temple by encouraging congregants to wear the colour white.[112]

The colour white is associated with simplicity of dress while bright colours are associated with weddings and festivity and is suggestive of being "overly" dressed. The main reason for prescribing the colour of the dress in the temple is to create the right mood during prayer and again separating auspiciousness from inauspiciousness. Colours such as black, brown, and dark green are considered inauspicious colours that do not contribute to the "right" attitude during prayer.[113] Unlike Christians, says Rajesh Kumar, we Hindus "would not wear black to a funeral or a wedding".[114]

A participant who holds a Sanathanist orientation towards Hinduism says that they are trying to get people to wear a similar colour at their services. Niren Singh says that they are encouraging their

members to wear white or cream or colours that "tone in" with the occasion. The important thing for him is that people should "be comfortable" and "fit in" at the temple.[115]

Hindu men in Durban generally dress in clothes that have been worn to the workplace out of convenience when attending prayers at temple. Those who have the luxury of going home first to change would do so; however, as I observed, most men remain in work clothes when they attend services at the temple on weekday evenings. The standard form of dress would be a pair of trousers and a shirt. There are a few Hindu men who would wear traditional clothes in the temple; however, unlike the sari that is customary for women, there is no prescribed dress for men. At weddings, the counterpart equivalent of a Hindu woman's dress is a Western styled suit and tie and it has become the most accepted form of dress for a man.[116] As Jithesh Rao says, "When I go to conferences, and I perform a lot of weddings, then most of the time I wear a suit and a tie".[117]

There are a few men who think that it is very important to wear traditional Indian clothing because it reflects their cultural heritage and Hindu identity. Yeshen Naidu says, he has a few *kurtas* in his wardrobe and feels that it is the appropriate dress for temple which reflects his cultural background. However, going to temple immediately after work means that he inevitably arrives there in Western clothes.[118]

However, what is traditional Indian dress? To speak of traditional dress in the singular would suggest that there was only one type of dress in India. From the background given in Chapter 3 it is evident that there were numerous castes and it would appear that clothes were worn to express class and caste affiliations (Joshi 1992). Although the sari continues to be widely accepted and retained as the dress for Indian women, and indeed women of all castes could wear them, the arrival of migrants and invaders in India would influence a change in the garments worn from unstitched (the sari) to stitched (Punjabi). So the sari too, which was initially only a long length of cloth wrapped around the wearer, had developed to include a stitched blouse and a petticoat, showing the influences of the cultures it had come into contact with. However, while women of all castes, as I said, wear the sari, their castes are reflected in the way in which they wear them. Joshi (1992, f.n.8:230) says that among the higher classes in Maharashtra, for example, the sari is worn by passing it between the legs and tucking it up behind the waist.

For the Hindu women in Durban, traditional means whatever they hold to be traditional to them, often continuing what traditional dress meant to their ancestors. However, while some women, like

the participant Vimala Devan, will not leave their houses without traditional Indian clothes, most other women have fully adapted to new styles of clothing which they acquired in interacting with the wider Durban society, and to meet the practical exigencies of work while reserving the traditional garments to reinforce kinship and religious identities. In Durban, western and eastern styles of clothing coexist. Here Subashni Reddy is a case in point. She is very flexible and comfortably embraces both cultural and western forms of clothing:

> I dress both western and eastern. I wear eastern clothes when I go to a function or a wedding or a prayer, then I really would dress that way. Otherwise I am very western in my dress. When I do wear eastern clothes I tend to go the whole nine yards. I love it.[119]

Taking off shoes

The requirement to create and maintain purity and cleanliness among Hindus finds expression in the removal of footwear. In some Hindu homes shoes are removed at the front door of the house. In other homes with less austere practices, shoes are worn in the house but not when approaching the domestic altar or the special room set aside for worship. According to Crawley (1931:44) the religious rule of removing one's shoes before entering a temple or sacred space is the same as that observed in the social habits of Indian people; the original reason for not entering with shoes was to avoid dust and dirt being brought into the house. Crawley, however, doesn't take this further. The idea may well have begun for reasons of practicality, but there is other meaning attached to this seemingly simple gesture. For the observant Hindu, taking a bath and putting on fresh clothes is the beginning of the preparation for worship. The removal of footwear at the entrance of the sacred space is what finally separates the worshipper from the mundane world and grants him access to the sacred world.

In my conversation with Ananda Venkatesan, I gathered that there were people of different religious persuasions that visit the ashram either as visitors or to participate in the temple's various programmes of worship and meditation. I asked him whether these people, not being members, had to do any particular thing to gain access to the temple and his reply was simply: "They take off their shoes and enter the temple".[120]

Diacritical markings

Among the Hindu participants, there were two women from the Hare Krishna movement who wore markings on their foreheads indicating their religious persuasion. The markings are called *tilak* and the version these two women wear, with vertical lines, is the opposite of the horizontal lines which identify the followers of Shiva, suggesting that they are followers of Krishna and therefore from the Vaishnavaite school. These visible markings – there are others which are not visible that are worn on the chest, throat, and arms of the devotee – are applied according to the rules governing their use, and they are usually marked on the devotee after taking a bath.

If one didn't know the background to the use of diacritical markings among Hare Krishna devotees, one might be tempted to ask whether these markings are a supplement, ornament, decoration, mutilation, or adornment to dress. But, as Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1992:14) warn, these kinds of terms could be used in a way that denigrates the behaviour of these devotees, and one should refrain from applying one's own cultural standards in distinguishing such features. For the devotees themselves they are a symbol of their beliefs, and so must be accepted for what they mean to them. For the two Hare Krishna participants in this study, the markings on their foreheads were explained as a religious symbol identifying them with their beliefs and practices in the Vaishnavaite school of thought, to which they are committed.

Other features that distinguish the Hare Krishna devotees from others is the small bag carrying their chanting beads that is draped across their shoulders and hangs at the side. At the temple these bags are ubiquitous, as are the markings on devotees' foreheads. When I asked these women how they felt about wearing such a marking, they answered that they were proud to be disciples of Krishna and the markings were a way of physically announcing their identities.[121]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how dietary restrictions formed around the prohibition of the cow by Hindus in Durban, and how these restrictions are maintained in order to preserve their religious and social identities. It was noted that the avoidance placed on the cow could only be understood in the larger context of the beliefs and practices held by Hindus, and how these beliefs and practices were implemented in their daily lives. In other words, it confirmed the principle set out earlier in this

thesis that where there are proscriptions there is necessarily a complex structure of prescriptions, the one giving rise to the other, and the two constituting the essence of Hindu identity.

Through the data it emerged that the cow is a sacred and inviolable symbol of Hindu identity, the observance of festivals is a core cultic practice necessary for collective identity, and the emphasis on performing ablutions and wearing the correct clothing contributes to the maintenance and preservation of religious identity among Hindus.

Endnotes

[1] Rao, Jithesh. 8th October 2010, p2-3. Interview at the Westville Hindu School: Westville, Durban.
[2] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p8. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[3] Murugan, Lutchmee. 18th October 2010, p1. Interview at her home in Verulam: Durban.
[4] Naidu, Yeshen. 31 August 2010. p2. Interview at his home in Greenwood Park: Durban.
[5] Ramchunder, Ramesh. 28th October 2010, p3. Interview at the O.R. Tambo Airport: Johannesburg.
[6] The Sanskritic gods are the high gods in the Hindu pantheon, namely Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The other gods include incarnations of Shiva and Vishnu. Offerings made to these gods are only vegetarian. The non-Sanskritic gods, among others, Durga, Kali, and Mariamman, are the village gods concerned with the daily events of people and often accept blood sacrifices (Harper 1959:228-30).
[7] Patil, Amrith. 27th August 2010, p2. Interview at his home in Effingham Heights: Durban.
[8] Mudaliar, Sivan. 29th June 2010, p8. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[9] Venkatesan, Ananda. 11th August 2010, p3. Interview at the Ramakrishna Centre: Phoenix, Durban.
[10] Murugan, Lutchmee. 18th October 2010, p3. Interview at her home in Verulam: Durban.
[11] Gopinath, Romilla. 29th August 2010, p6. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[12] Shah, Vishen. 19th October 2010, p3. Interview at his home in Addington Beach: Durban.
[13] Venkatesan, Ananda. 11th August 2010, p5. Interview at the Ramakrishna Centre: Phoenix, Durban.
[14] Rao, Jithesh. 8th October 2010, p10-11. Interview at the Westville Hindu School: Westville, Durban.
[15] While the official policy of apartheid dates only from 1948, my participants frequently appear to use the term to refer to a situation before that date which was marked by deeply entrenched discriminatory practices which negatively affected Indians.
[16] Venkatesan, Ananda. 11th August 2010, p5. Interview at the Ramakrishna Centre: Phoenix, Durban.
[17] ibid.:p8-9.
[18] Mudaliar, Sivan. 29th June 2010, p9. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[19] Patil, Amrith. 27th August 2010, p5. Interview at his home in Effingham Heights: Durban.
[20] Raju, Kovlin. 8th September 2010, p8. Interview at his home in Durban North: Durban.
[21] Patil, Amrith. 27th August 2010, p3. Interview at his home in Effingham Heights: Durban.
[22] Ramchunder, Ramesh. 28th October 2010, p3. Interview at the O.R. Tambo Airport: Johannesburg. John Hick (1985:72-3) confirms that most people born into a religion tend to stay in that religion. While he says that conversions will always occur, they tend to be a relatively small percentage of the population.
[23] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p7. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[24] Naidu, Yeshen. 31 August 2010. p5. Interview at his home in Greenwood Park: Durban. Clifford Geertz (1973:142-169) makes a similar point, in his illustration of the death of a Modjokuto boy, about the beliefs and rituals of a Javanese death rite that have operated for many generations and which failed to work with their "accustomed effectiveness" on this occasion.
[25] Venkatesan, Ananda. 11th August 2010, p5. Interview at the Ramakrishna Centre: Phoenix, Durban.
[26] Murugan, Lutchmee. 18th October 2010, p2. Interview at her home in Verulam: Durban
[27] Mahadhevan, Gopalan. 13th August 2010, p4. Interview at the Shree Ranganathar Temple: Greenwood Park, Durban.

[28] Chopra, Shoba. 31st August 2010, p3. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban; Patil, Amrith. 27th August 2010, p3. Interview at his home in Effingham Heights: Durban; Raju, Kovlin. 8th September 2010, p2. Interview at his home in Durban North: Durban.
[29] Chopra, Shoba. 31st August 2010, p8. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban
[30] Chopra Shoba, 31st August 2010, p7. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[31] Venkatesan, Ananda. 11th August 2010, p7. Interview at the Ramakrishna Centre: Phoenix, Durban.
[32] Mahadhevan, Gopalan, 13th August 2010, p8. Interview at the Shree Ranganathar Temple: Greenwood Park, Durban.
[33] Raju, Kovlin. 8th September 2010, p2. Interview at his home in Durban North: Durban.
[34] Chopra, Shoba, 31st August 2010, p7. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[35] Similarly, other idiomatic expressions relating to the maternal nature of the cow were articulated in the following ways: "When a mother has a child, and if the mother for whatever reason may not be able to feed the child on the mother's milk... cow's milk was used. The cow stood in as the mother" (Rao: 8th October 2010, p7. Interview at the Westville Hindu School: Westville, Durban); "We look to the cow as a mother as the provider of nourishment" (Kumar: 8th September 2010, p3. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban); "In Hinduism the cow depicts the mother" (Prasad: 28th July 2010, p6. Interview at his home in Woodhurst: Chatsworth); "...scripturally, the cow is a symbol of creation. Whenever the cow is mentioned, it says that god incarnates because of the gurus, the devas [the gods] and the cow" (Singh: 10th September 2010, p12. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban).
[36] Chopra, Shoba. 31st August 2010, p7. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[37] Prasad, Ajay. 28th July 2010, p6. Interview at his home in Woodhurst: Chatsworth.
[38] Polony is a processed meat loaf made up of off-cuts of beef and pork, and spices. It is commonly eaten as a filling in sandwiches.
[39] Mudaliar, Sivan. 29th June 2010, p7. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[40] ibid.
[41] Raju, Kovlin. 8th September 2010, p8. Interview at his home in Durban North: Durban.
[42] Venkatesan, Ananda. 11th August 2010, p8. Interview at the Ramakrishna Centre: Phoenix, Durban.
[43] Swami Ramakrishna is the nineteenth century mystic whose religious views led to the formation of the Ramakrishna Mission through his disciple Swami Vivekananda.
[44] Gopinath, Romilla. 29th August 2010, p7. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[45] ibid.
[46] Devan, Vimala. 8th September 2010, p8-9. Interview at her home in Durban North: Durban. Arjun Appadurai (1981:497) in his study on the culinary orthodoxies of the "scrupulously vegetarian" Tamil Brahmans in south India mentions a similar type of meal consumed daily.
[47] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p10. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[48] "You must be a vegetarian on the day you know you are going to the temple", says Niren Singh, who is a scholar of *Bhagavad Gita*, and is often called to act in a priestly role in his community (Singh: 10th September 2010, p5. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban); "We expect them to be vegetarian for a few days if participating in the *hawan* at the temple so that they don't have negative vibes from having consumed meat, says Sivan Mudaliar, who is involved in various leadership positions at his organisation (Mudaliar: 29th June 2010. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban).
[49] Rao, Jithesh. 8th October 2010, p8. Interview at the Westville Hindu School: Westville, Durban.
[50] Murugan, Lutchmee. 18th October 2010, p5-6. Interview at her home in Verulam: Durban.
[51] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p12. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[52] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p9. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.
[53] Devan, Vimala. 8th September 2010, p10. Interview at her home in Durban North: Durban.
[54] Reddy, Subashni. 31st August 2010, p4. Interview at her home in Greenwood Park: Durban.
[55] For Shoba Chopra, eating food that is pure makes her pure and it would follow from this that eating impure food will make her impure (Chopra: 31st August 2010, p5. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban). In anthropological studies, the proverbs, "Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you who you are", from the French, and "You are what you eat", from the German, have pointed to among other issues, the relationship of social groups to the environment and the symbolic construction of cultures (Messer 1984:205).
[56] Prasad, Ajay. 28th July 2010, p2. Interview at his home in Woodhurst: Chatsworth.
[57] Mudaliar, Sivan. 29th June 2010, p9. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[58] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p7. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.

[59] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p9. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[60] Chopra, Shoba. 31st August 2010, p3-4. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[61] Gopinath, Romilla. 29th August 2010, p 2. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[62] ibid.:2,7.
[63] Dayal, Dinesh. 8th July 2010, p2. Interview at his work in Victoria Embankment: Durban.
[64] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p12. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.
[65] Devan, Vimala. 8th September 2010, p9. Interview at her home in Durban North: Durban.
[66] Dayal, Dinesh. 8th July 2010, p1. Interview at his work in Victoria Embankment: Durban.
[67] Braai, a South African culinary term, is short for *braaivleis*. In the Afrikaans language, braai means grilled and *vleis* means meat. The word braai, now used universally in South Africa, therefore means meat grilled over hot coals. However, the meaning of the word has broadened to now include any other food cooked over hot coals, which may include vegetables.
[68] Murugan, Lutchmee. 18th October 2010, p5-6. Interview at her home in Verulam: Durban.
[69] Reddy, Subashni. 31st August 2010, p5. Interview at her home in Greenwood Park: Durban.
[70] Ramchunder, Ramesh. 28th October 2010, p4. Interview at the O.R. Tambo Airport: Johannesburg.
[71] ibid.
[72] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p9. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.
[73] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p11. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[74] Gopalan is Tamil-speaking (Mahadhevan: 13th August 2010, p4. Interview at the Shree Ranganathar Temple: Greenwood Park, Durban); and Subashni is Telegu-speaking (Reddy: 31st August 2010, p2. Interview at her home in Greenwood Park: Durban).
[75] Kumar, Rajesh. 8th September 2010, p5-6. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[76] I attended the *Janmashtami* festival celebrating the birth of Krishna with the Hare Krishna devotees in Isipingo, Durban. I had the good fortune of being under the guidance and hospitality of a very devout Hare Krishna devotee, who participated in this study, and her family for the day. I was therefore able to observe not only the public celebrations but also the private family preparing for such an occasion. The festivities began after sunset, while preparations for the feast began early that morning, which I was part of. After kitchen duties, I went to the home of my hosts, where we took baths and put on our saris and Punjabis prior to celebrating the festival. Krishna, the god, clad in new clothing and colourful flowers for the occasion of his birthday, was brought into the hall in a procession of family members and high ranking officials in the organisation, and was then installed on a platform, thus making the god the centre of the event. The evening was made up of joyous singing and chanting, *puja*, scripture reading and discourses recounting the birth of Krishna. Enormous lengths of fresh flower garlands and other festive decorations adorned the hall where the celebration took place. There was much excitement in the colourfully festooned hall, accompanied by much pomp and ceremony, amidst beating *tablas* (a kind of drum) and jingling cymbals, and *dhoti* clad, *sikha* sporting, dancing devotees. The evening ended with a vegetarian feast.
[77] Kumar, Rajesh. 8th September 2010, p6. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[78] Reddy, Subashni. 31st August 2010, p4. Interview at her home in Greenwood Park: Durban.
[79] Steven Vertovec (1992:201-2) has reported on this same festival among the Hindus of Trinidad, for whom the *jhandi* is even more important than the household shrine.
[80] John D. Kelly (1988) has recounted the importance of celebrating *Divali* among Hindus who settled in Fiji and J. C. Jha (1976) also reports on *Divali* as a major festival among Hindus who have settled in the Caribbean.
[81] Ramchunder, Ramesh. 28th October 2010, p1. Interview at the O.R. Tambo Airport: Johannesburg.
[82] J.C. Jha (1975:55) says that since Ayodhya was cleansed and lit up to welcome the exiles, Hindus consider it necessary to clean up their surroundings in the re-enactment of this legend.
[83] J. C. Jha (1976:55-6) gives a similar account of the cleaning and preparation for *Divali* among the Hindu Caribbeans.
[84] Devan, Vimala. 8th September 2010, p9. Interview at her home in Durban North: Durban.
[85] Mahadhevan, Gopalan. 13th August 2010, p9. Interview at the Shree Ranganathar Temple: Greenwood Park, Durban.
[86] Gopinath, Romilla. 29th August 2010, p5. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[87] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p9. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.
[88] There appear to be various spellings of this word; Steven Vertovec (1992:164) spells it *rot*, and some recipes I looked at online spell it *roth*. I spell it the way the participants in this study pronounced it.

[89] Among the Hindus of Trinidad this festival in honour of Hanuman is called *rot puja* (Vertovec 1992:164) taking its name from the food.
[90] Kumar, Rajesh. 8th September 2010, p8. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[91] A similar point was raised by Lutchmee Murugan: 18th October 2010, p2. Interview at her home in Verulam: Durban.
[92] Devan, Vimala. 8th September 2010,p9. Interview at her home in Durban North: Durban.
[93] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p10. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.
[94] Kumar, Rajesh. 8th September 2010, p5. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[95] Ernest Crawley (1931:71) mentions the ancient Greeks who put on clean clothes before ceremonial worship; the Shinto priests who put on clean garments before officiating at a ceremony; a Muslim who would remove dirty clothes before prayer or abstain from prayer completely; and new clothes that are worn at the ordination of ancient Brahmans.
[96] Shah, Vishen. 19th October 2010, p5. Interview at his home in Addington Beach: Durban.
[97] Among the Havik Brahmins, says Edward B. Harper (1964:173), cotton worn by ritually pure Brahmins can easily become defiled whereas silk is resistant to "mild impurity" but transmits "strong impurities".
[98] Devan, Vimala. 8th September 2010, p8. Interview at her home in Durban North: Durban.
[99] Venkatesan, Ananda. 11th August 2010, p6. Interview at the Ramakrishna Centre: Phoenix, Durban.
[100] ibid.
[101] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p7. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.
[102] Mudaliar, Sivan. 29th June 2010, p6. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[103] Kallichuran, Arjun. 9th September 2010, p5. Interview at his home in Umhlatuzana Township: Chatsworth.
[104] Murugan, Lutchmee. 18th October 2010, p4. Interview at her home in Verulam: Durban.
[105] Gopinath, Romilla. 29th August 2010, p8. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.
[106] Niren Singh, who is a leader in his temple, says that they expect people to wear traditional and not Western clothes (Singh: 10th September 2010, p12. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban).
[107] Kumar, Rajesh. 8th September 2010, p5. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[108] Mahadhevan, Gopalan. 13th August 2010, p6. Interview at the Shree Ranganathar Temple: Greenwood Park, Durban.
[109] Mudaliar, Sivan. 29th June 2010, p5-6. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[110] Shah, Vishen. 19th October 2010, p5. Interview at his home in Addington Beach: Durban.
[111] Prasad, Ajay. 28th July 2010, p6. Interview at his home in Woodhurst: Chatsworth.
[112] Raju, Kovlin. 8th September 2010, p11. Interview at his home in Durban North: Durban.
[113] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p12. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[114] Kumar, Rajesh. 8th September 2010, p5. Interview at his home in Mobeni Heights: Durban.
[115] Singh, Niren. 10th September 2010, p12. Interview at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban.
[116] Vinay Bahl (2005) in her study on the personal experiences of South Asian women and clothes has discovered that Asian men's formal dress in most contemporary societies is westernised and that it is not necessarily the same for women's formal dress. Are women, she asks, being conformists to "native" culture by resisting Western culture and wearing "traditional" dress?
[117] Rao, Jithesh. 8th October 2010, p6. Interview at the Westville Hindu School: Westville, Durban.
[118] Naidu, Yeshen. 31 August 2010, p9. Interview at his home in Greenwood Park: Durban; Dayal, Dinesh. 8th July 2010, p4. Interview at his work in Victoria Embankment: Durban.
[119] Reddy, Subashni. 31st August 2010, p9. Interview at her home in Greenwood Park: Durban.
[120] Venkatesan, Ananda. 11th August 2010, p6. Interview at the Ramakrishna Centre: Phoenix, Durban.
[121] Chopra, Shoba. 31st August 2010, p7. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban. Gopinath, Romilla, 29th August 2010, p5. Interview at her home in Isipingo: Durban.

Chapter 5

Introduction

In chapter 3, I provided a background for understanding the practices and beliefs undergirding the religion of Jews. In this chapter, I show how dietary practices, which are built around the exclusion of the pig, are used by the Jewish participants in the study in the construction and maintenance of their identities. I examine what is allowed and what is not allowed in the home and outside the home through their extensive daily practices of *kashrut,* and the weekly observance of Sabbath. I then look at community and the effects of inter-marriage for group identity.

Following this, I ask: is there flexibility in their practices? Are there those who violate the standards set by the religious group? What sanctions are there? Does violation of the rules make them lesser Jews? This chapter illuminates the practices and beliefs held by the practitioners of this faith that I interviewed in Durban.

In developing the concept of identity, Douglas's (1966) analysis of the separation of pure and defiled are especially useful. Among the Jews of Durban, group notions of identity are clearly evident with prescribed rules and laws to separate insider from outsider, and pure from defiled or polluted. Thus as Douglas (1966) has shown, the sacred texts as reflected in the Book of Leviticus, for example, are dominated by the desire to divide the world into pure and impure, sacred and profane, in which the mixing of categories is considered a threat to community. In these texts a system is established to classify and order the world through the laws permitting and forbidding food consumption. And as Douglas (1966:4) says: "...ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below...with and against, that a semblance of order is created" and a boundary is constructed and maintained between them and others.

This system of ordering, separating, and dividing of things in society is central to the understanding of Judaism and its present practices. Jewish identity in Durban, therefore, may be highlighted in three categories of boundary-maintenance activities: the practice of *kashrut*, the weekly observance of the Sabbath, and marriage. These are the underpinnings of their beliefs which are carried out through the careful and meticulous ordering of time and space and through which their social and

religious identities remain resistant to mixing with others. It is also evident that these categories of activities structure their lives into a relatively intact community and differentiate between those who belong and who those who do not belong. Each of these categories is discussed below.

Kashrut

A group's ideas of purity and impurity invariably reflect an extreme concern about maintaining and protecting religious and social boundaries to prevent its members from straying into the outside world by providing activities and practices that they can adhere to in order to remain as insiders. The practice of *kashrut* must then be the ostensible foundation of all Jewish culinary practices in which food is made fit and legitimate for consumption through the plethora of laws and rules regarding the selection, preparation and consumption of food for Jews.

All fourteen Jews who participated in this study have categorically stated that they do not eat pork as observant practitioners of their religion and they were uniformly adamant about this, as is conveyed in these verbal bites: I will not eat pork![1]; Pork is specifically a no-no[2]; I don't bring in pork[3]; Do we have pork? No![4]; I have not indulged in eating bacon, or ham[5]; Pork is forbidden[6]; We never had anything to do with the pig[7]; We don't do pork[8]; No pork[9]; I don't eat pork[10]; I am vegetarian but my family would not eat pork[11]. There were at least two women who have converted to Judaism and have now adopted the rules regarding dietary laws and its requisite practices, and who had confessed that they had eaten pork before renouncing their previous beliefs and practices.

Pork is one of the most widely-known avoidances by Jews, and as these quotes show, also one of their most strongly articulated practices. Leah, a participant, put this in one of the most strongly felt terms when she said, "If anyone wants to offend anything Jewish, they will put a pig's head [in front of them]. The two things that offend most Jews are swastikas and pigs; holocaust and pork"[12].

But pork is not the only food that is forbidden to Jews. There is an entire system in place that includes other proscriptions as well as the requisite prescriptions so that Jews are able to conduct their lives both inside and outside the home in a manner that is considered proper and acceptable to Jewishness. Although the details of the practice involved in the system are variously interpreted by the different Jewish denominations, particularly those of the Orthodox and Reform in the context of my study, the most critical observance marking the identity of the Jew is the commandment prohibiting the consumption of the pig.

Among the other forbidden foods drawn from what the participants mentioned are: fish that do not have fins and scales; shell fish such as crab, prawn, or langoustine; insects that hide in broccoli, strawberries and lettuce leaves, or any other foliage of fruit and vegetables; and *traife* food – that is, animals that are not slaughtered in the prescribed manner. So, even where certain animals are prescribed for consumption, it is only the correct and proper ritual killing of the animal by an authorised slaughterer that will make the meat acceptable for consumption.

But to list these avoidances seems too facile because it belies the complexity that is entailed in the exclusion of these foods from the dietary habits of the Jews. It is to the kitchen that we must go in order to see how the exclusion of the pig and the required inclusion of other foods is manifested.

The kitchen

Judaism begins in the kitchen, where food is prepared and cooked. It is here that the beliefs and practices of Jews begin to take form and have meaning. While belief exists at an intellectual level, the realisation of Judaism requires many material practices, many of which are in the kitchen. Many of the *mitzvot* are given expression here. For example, while the Sabbath table (discussed below) can be seen as an altar in the home, its starting point is the kitchen; indeed, there can be no Sabbath without the kitchen.

The prohibition against the pig is part of the complex set of dietary laws, or *kashrut*, which call for a range of prescriptions, above all, a carefully and meticulously planned kitchen. Another commandment not to cook a kid in its mother's milk has led Jews to refrain from mixing milk and meat. This further prohibition required of Jews has led to their extraordinarily regulated arrangements in the kitchen.

The kitchen is divided into different sections. There is a place for cooking, a place for washing, and a place for storage. How things are cooked, which requires that milk and meat should not be mixed, has consequences for the way things are washed and stored.

The scullery is divided into two sections with two sets of sinks, the one for washing dishes used for the preparation and consumption of milk dishes, and the other for meat dishes. Where such an elaborate system is not available, especially where space is limited because some of the participants

live in small spaces, an appropriate mechanism is put in place to cope with this situation, which in the case of washing up will consist of an additional set of portable basins.[13] Drying cloths for the respective dishes are also marked and separated accordingly.

Rules related to the preparation and consumption of food set out specific ways of storing kitchen utensils and refrigerated items. There are two fridges: one for meat and meat-related foods, the other for milk and dairy products. Where the observant Jew has only one fridge, again because of limitations of space, every effort is made to stop milk from dripping onto meat held in the same refrigerator by making sure that milk bottles are well sealed. In his interview, Samuel Ezra, who is a kosher supervisor and a person who is staunch about kosher practice, explained how complex this can become because of limited space and cold storage. He also explained that kosher practice requires vigilance over the mixing of milk and meat both on the part of the husband and wife.[14] Negligence, he says, can "cause conflict". For Samuel, the worst thing that could occur, where only one fridge exists in the kitchen, is the "dripping" of one kind of food on to another which may lead to unpermitted mixing".[15]

Clearly, mistakes are not allowed in the kitchen; any error of judgment can upset the "order and tidiness", in Douglas's (1966) words, in the arrangement and practice of *kashrut.*

Kitchen utensils, pots, pans, glassware and crockery are similarly divided into two sets, one for the preparation and consumption of meat, the other for milk. This is further complicated by some festivals and their specific requirements, for example the festival of *Pesach*. As Hannah says, "Strictly kosher means...a whole set for *Pesach* and a whole set for the rest of the year".[16] This is the very basic culinary structure of the kitchen; arranged and organised in a way that Jews are able to keep and maintain the requirement of their dietary laws. It is from the kitchen that other practices ensue, such as the observance of the Sabbath. Together with the lighting of candles and prayers, it is the Sabbath meal which was most mentioned by the participants of this study as the most important religious and social event, and this too has its genesis in the kitchen. So there is a close relationship between kitchen and dining area, with the one making the other possible. This cannot be over-emphasised, since the restrictions placed on consumption affect culinary behaviour in the kitchen.

Having entered the kitchen, we need to consider some of the core beliefs of the participants of this study which give rise to the extensive set-up described above. The injunction not to eat certain foods comes from Jewish sacred texts and the laws associated with the practice of *kashrut*. What seems to

have emerged in this study is that although I have been looking at Jews as a homogenous group, the difference between the Orthodox and Reformed traditions becomes apparent in the way they practice the laws of *kashrut*.

There are several points to consider here. One is that the rabbi in charge of kosher supervision of meat products in Durban is concerned that of just under 2000 Jews that live in Durban, only one member of the Reformed community buys kosher meat from the butchery, which as it happens is the only kosher butchery in the city. In other words, almost the only Jews using the services of the butchery are Orthodox. A second concern of his is that there are only a few "drivers" of the Jewish "bus" in Durban, by which he means that obedience to the laws of *kashrut* in general is practiced by only a small number of Jews who follow these laws fastidiously.[17] This is not to say, however, that Jews don't refrain from eating pork in their homes, even though they may not follow full kosher laws.

Those who keep the laws of *kashrut* to the full extent – generally Orthodox – understand the complexity and detailed arrangements involved in such practices. Yet, whether Orthodox or Reformed, for both these groups who keep *kashrut* to varying degrees of intensity, the pig remains abominable as a universal commandment among the Jews in Durban. This is the centre of gravity for both these groups, uniting them despite all other differences between them in how they arrange their kitchens and choose their ingredients. I begin by examining what the participants themselves have to say regarding the various culinary proscriptions and prescriptions they are commanded to keep.

Orthodox Jews and the practice of kashrut

It was clear from the Orthodox Jews who participated in this study that there is a clear understanding of the biblical injunction that only animals that chew the cud and have cloven hooves are permitted for consumption, alongside all the other creatures that may be eaten, as set out in chapter 3. According to Abraham Kosminsky, an Orthodox rabbi, the practice and articulation of *kashrut* is "tricky" and complex when starting off. For example, in the rabbi's conversion classes, he has come to realise that the rules regarding *kashrut* are very difficult for people who have not grown up with these practices, or those undertaking these practices when setting up their own homes in marriage, and that it requires a "large mind shift". Once the system for implementing the rules has been established, the "habit" quickly becomes entrenched so as to become almost "second nature"

to the practising Jew. For the rabbi, who also only very recently started keeping a kosher kitchen, the practice is so spontaneous and natural that, "If I am getting cheese I get the blue plate and if I am getting chicken I get the white plate" .[18]

For other observant Jews, too, the maintenance of *kashrut* and the practices associated with it seem to be effortless. Isaac Davidson said that he was raised in a kosher home so the details of organisation and implementation are "simple" for him.[19]

Not all Orthodox Jews in Durban are able to keep the full dietary laws because of their particular circumstances. Leah Harris, for example, has an unusual biography that has affected the manner in which she interprets her faith. She is the daughter of a German-Jewish mother who escaped Germany in 1936 but was not a practising Jew and in fact had been fully assimilated into German society. Her father was British, and she was brought up in the tradition of the Church of England, and so raised as a Christian. At seventeen she had a yearning to go in search of her "roots and heritage", something she cannot quite explain. Indeed, her mother initially opposed her pursuing her Jewish identity: as Leah put it, "her own personal experience had been so difficult. She kept saying to me that life is tough enough; you don't want to be Jewish on top of it". Leah's story and her historical beginnings have caused her to practice her Orthodox Judaism in a different way. While she didn't need to convert – because she is biologically Jewish being the daughter of a Jewish woman – she took it on herself to learn Hebrew and Jewish philosophy, and to learn as much as she could about Jewish cooking and their way of life by immersing herself in the Jewish community. While she is adamant that she will not eat the flesh of the proscribed pig, and sees this as intrinsically "tied up" with her Jewish identity, Leah may not be so fastidious or well-disposed to keeping a kosher kitchen with the complex arrangements and divisions that this entails. She ascribes this to the fact that she did not grow up in a Jewish household and had never cooked Jewish food or even seen it being cooked. Leah pointed out to me that "there is so much about a way of life...in any kind of ethnic culture that requires you to have grown up with it", in order to fully practice it with all its intricacies, so that while she knew in theory, "how to make appropriate foods for the different celebrations", this was something she acquired with difficulty.[20]

The problem of Leah not keeping kosher to the extent that is considered proper by others who keep kosher means that Leah cannot invite people to her home for a meal. She finds the whole task of preparing kosher foods for observant Jews "technically difficult" to accomplish. "I sometimes think", she says, "oh it is really a shame that I am so wayward and that I should do it just for the purpose.

But I think that it is something that, because it is such a rigorous commitment, needs to be something you spiritually relate to"[21].

Leah's story illustrates something I came across a number of times during my interviews – that the realities of Jewish life in a modern, multi-cultural, and to some extent assimilated setting, sometimes mean they do not, or cannot, maintain a doctrinally pure lifestyle, or one that conforms to traditional depictions of Jewish life in, for example, Eastern Europe. This story also illustrates the disjunction between religious commandments and the socially structured ways of actualising such commandments.

Rachel Goldstone's story about the central role played by her domestic servant of many years, and committed Christian, Doreen, shows how the housewife's traditionally critical role in creating a Jewish home has been surrendered to some extent – at least in South African Jewish life – to well-trained servants. Doreen had worked in a strictly kosher home before starting work with Rachel, who told me she didn't keep a strictly kosher home. This changed to some extent when Doreen arrived, Rachel told me, because she "introduced Jewish traditions into my home". On another occasion, referring to Rachel's inadequacies in keeping kosher practice, Doreen said "Ray, we can't have Pesach without doing this". Even the daughters of Doreen's previous employer, who had been brought up so strictly kosher, would phone her for advice about kosher procedure.[22]

Reform Jews and the practice of kashrut

Reform Judaism arose in response to Orthodox traditions in its attempt to concur with the exigencies of contemporary life and thought. The fundamental difference between Reform and Orthodox Judaism revolves around the authority of the *halakhah*: Orthodox Judaism accepts both its biblical and rabbinic expressions while Reform Judaism does not consider the *halakhah* to be binding, nor does it accept that the oral Torah was revealed by Moses (Werblowsky and Wogoder 1966:328). Hence a different doctrinal expression has emerged that is based on the same mythological representations but interpreting them differently (Hellig 1984:105).It therefore maintains its right to adapt and alter Jewish traditions so as to make the traditions more relevant and applicable to each generation. Reform men maintain the wearing of *yarmulka* (head coverings) in synagogue services. The women of Reform Judaism are given full rights to participate in the synagogue services and they are seated together with the men for the service. The Reform synagogue, The Temple David I visited in Overport, still reflects in its architectural layout the defunct

practice when women were seated upstairs in the gallery separately from the men. In dress too, the Reform practitioners exhibit the classic requirement of modesty albeit in a more contemporary style.

Milka Rothschild, a Reform woman who is president of her community and a teacher, says about dress: “Look for me personally, I don’t dress like the Orthodox women with the wig and polo necks up to here”, she says, pointing to the upmost part of her neck. “There are certain things that I would not do. I don’t uncover the tops of my arms but lots of women here (referring to the Reform temple) are quite comfortable to do that. I don’t, I wouldn’t say that I never wear trousers, but I rarely wear trousers. I would never wear trousers to Shul”.[23]

The position of the men, too, regarding dress appears to be more relaxed and contextual in response to the hot Durban weather: “...traditionally the more Orthodox you are the very much of a dress code you had as if Moses walked around in this black outfit. In Durban...open-neck shirts and slacks would be considered perfectly reasonable; shorts, slops, possibly not”.[24]

However, the Orthodox do not look well on the Reform practice of *kashrut*. Samuel, the supervisor at the only kosher butchery in Durban is rather concerned about this matter. The kosher butchery is, for Jews, a requisite appendage to the kitchen of the Jewish home if proper practices are to be maintained.[25] As a person who is authoritative on kosher meat and ritual slaughter as given in the Books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, Samuel Ezra accepts and believes that god had orally transmitted to Moses the method of slaughter and that the rabbinical laws are the practical application of the biblical law. When I interviewed Samuel at the kosher butchery he ministers, the front of shop being busy he ushered me to a small office with only one chair and made me sit. Having settled with the commonplace greetings and having asked about my study, he then proceeded with what I thought sounded like he was going to offer me a cup of coffee when in lieu he said: “we don’t like people bringing coffee into this section just in case it spills”, and after having said that he gave a great big laugh. By then, of course, I had understood.[26]

Keeping kosher and being an observant Jew is so important for Samuel that he is willing to make a “nuisance” of himself when acting as an official at the synagogue kitchen to make sure that milk and meat sections remain separate and that “there are no hitches in the transfer”. However, he is concerned about the desperately low figures of Reform patronage at the butchery. Some Jews, he says, think that *kashrut* is just “an antiquated set of health laws” taken from the bible which they do not consider to be divinely inspired. Only ten per cent of all Durban Jews, he thinks, keep kosher.[27]

What Samuel is concerned about is that when the observance of *kashrut*, in particular, "goes down, it is the beginning of the end of the community". If, he argues, that the butchery were to close down, the community of Durban Jews would disintegrate. He is therefore adamant that standards must be high otherwise observant Jews would not feel welcome to live in Durban.

However, finding kosher meats can sometimes be difficult as there is only one kosher butchery in Durban. Although the butchery is situated in the heartland of a predominately Jewish area, those who live far away from this shopping centre do find it an inconvenience to obtain kosher meat. What's more is that kosher meats cost a lot more than non-kosher meats, not only because they are sent through from Johannesburg but the slaughtering, deveining, and removal of the blood from the carcass requires specialised and appointed personnel. The kosher supervisor of the butchery worried that only a few members of the Reform tradition buy from the kosher butchery. Perhaps there is an explanation for this as another participant from the Reform movement told me that many Jews buy their kosher meats directly from Johannesburg; the meat is fresher, he says, and they get it at half the price.[28] Other Jews, as will be shown below, have found different ways of keeping kosher in their homes by becoming vegetarian, thus avoiding the complexities required to fulfil the commandments of *kashrut*.

While many Reform Jews who participated in this study do not keep all the requirements of *kashrut*, they nevertheless steer clear from pork, shell fish, *traife* food, and refrain from mixing milk and meat.

When I interviewed Hannah Levine at her grand Ridge Road apartment, with its elegant furnishings and unlimited views of the sea and the very welcome sea breeze on a mid-October afternoon in Durban while sipping on a pomegranate drink which she made us, I had experienced for the first time what it meant to live on the correct side of the Berea slopes; I had grown up on the opposite side of this sea-facing side in Overport, which got oppressively hot in the summer. Hannah is a very busy woman, visible by the high piles of files covering her dining room table and the non-stop ringing of her phone; as the founder member of the World Council for Religion and Peace (WCRP) she initially started interfaith work with the Jewish community and then began inviting "non-Jews" [sic] or faith-based religious leaders to attend. Her work includes, among other things, campaigning against apartheid, educating children on HIV Aids at schools, and bringing professional leaders from all sectors of the community, such as business, university, religion and community, together in a

forum. Hannah's Judaism, therefore, reflects a no-nonsense outlook; being the kind of person she is who is unsentimentally rooted in the concerns of the present and having modern sensibilities, her understanding of Judaism is in the present rather than in a mythical past. She is therefore comfortably ensconced in her Reform practices and finds that it suitably enriches her life.[29]

Reflecting on her earlier life forty six years ago, she reminiscences on the vast quantities of food she produced for "big Jewish functions, dinner parties, and our *Bar Mitsvahs*" and the huge amounts of red meat consumed at these functions, which would take her two days to prepare. Now, being health conscious she has become aware of the need to eat more salads and fish and her ideal meal which she can produce in less than an hour consists of "a nice salad and soup, and a vegetable dish with some crusty bread, and fruit salad and ice cream". Note that this meal is still in keeping with the laws of *kashrut*; by going vegetarian the menu avoids the insistence on kosher meat, and also obeys the commandment not to mix milk with meat. Her approach to the kitchen has become a practical and creative interpretation of *kasrut,* relating it to her health and modern life-style. So while Hannah will not bring in *traife* food, pork, or shell fish, does not divide her kitchen to accommodate the separation of milk and meat, and does not have, for that matter, two fridges, she is still able to keep and maintain her version of *kashrut* that identifies her with her Judaism.[30]

It is perhaps these ideas relating to Reform practices, and the reservations of these practitioners about keeping certain practices that they see as archaic and having no meaning for them, which are summed up succinctly by Caleb Rosenthal when he said that "...it is what you take out of a religion". What Caleb appears to be saying is that much of the traditions and religious practices in Judaism were developed in the shtetls and ghettos which were "over-enclosed" and "over-concentrated to protect you from the outside". Therefore, "higher and higher barriers" were built. In the contemporary context there should be a re-examination of what is important in religion:

> I think as a Progressive Jew you need to look at what's the essence of what is important in the religion and in the culture rather than concentrate and hide behind ritual for the sake of ritual.[31]

Other Reform participants I interviewed also expressed their avoidance for some key foods given in the commandments and they are less pedantic in how these practices are articulated often reflecting on the austerities of Orthodox practitioners when talking about their own. Milka Rothschild, for example, keeps kosher in a limited way, but will not mix milk and meat at the same

meal, eat pork, shell fish, or fish that does not fall under the edible category, and the forbidden insects as well. However, she says, she does not go to the same extent of the very Orthodox who wash their fruit and vegetables in kitchen liquid soap to get rid of bugs and insects.[32]

Tamar Rubenstein is a convert to Reform Judaism[33] not because of marriage but because she had always wanted to be Jewish. Her attitude is that she really wanted to become a Jew and had been through the rigors of conversion and so she has immersed herself fully in her new-found religion and got "involved" with community and practices. About the strictness in a kosher kitchen and the extensive washing required to remove insects, she is approving about such antique practices and regards them as a good thing. Tamar, a former nurse, thinks that at least "everything gets properly washed and properly inspected".[34]

Are there sanctions for those who eat the pig?

The thing about the forbidden pig and the forbidden prawn is that, as a few Jews I spoke to mentioned, these items of food have a high gastronomic value. This is emphasised in the following quotes from some of my participants: "Pork is fabulous and sweet, and tasty";[35] "There is nothing like the smell of bacon cooking and there is nothing like the smell of prawns cooking";[36] "...when I look at a prawn every now and again I – mmmmmnh"...laughs Rebekah Adam, after smacking her lips.[37] The smell of frying bacon is often presented in popular culture, along with the scent of freshly brewed coffee, as an intensely inviting aroma, and even some of my *kashrut*-practising Jewish participants admitted that while they find the smell of bacon very tempting, they desist from partaking in the esculent pig. What makes Jews abstain from something that is edible and acceptable as food to other people? What, too, would happen if a Jew does violate the law and eats pork?

A few participants in this study said that there are apparently some Jews who eat bacon[38] and think that there is no "big deal" and that it is "quite cool". For Leah Harris, not eating pork is very much "tied up" with her being Jewish and goes beyond just a matter of a prescription arising from the biblical text. Leah has emphatically said that if she had been out to lunch with me and if she had ordered a bacon salad, she would be letting down the Jewish people. Not eating pork, she continued, means that a "small part of her identity is kept". She told me that she is irritated when she sees someone Jewish eating pork. Nice as they may be, says Leah, they don't have a sense of identity. Leah argues that when there is so much else to eat, why is it that some will choose to eat pork? [39]

I asked Milka Rothschild if she would consider herself a lesser Jew is she did eat pork and she said: "Will I be struck down? No, it is nothing like that". For Milka, it is a small sacrifice she makes by not eating the proscribed food and eventually it becomes something that she no longer wants. Of course, Milka thinks that it wouldn't be good if someone from her congregation saw her eating a bacon sandwich. However, she says that "group pressure is minimal rather than the driving force" behind such abstinence.[40] Perhaps group pressure and personal conscience are so bound up that it is difficult to separate them, just as the individual in Judaism is inseparable from the Jewish community.

For Leah and Milka, and others who participated in this study, the consumption of pork suggests the neglect or abandonment of Jewish identity, while not consuming pork stands for an identity that is part and parcel of being Jewish. Ingesting pork would designate them as being "not Jews". Food, with its prohibitions and prescriptions in Judaism, is paramount to the construction and maintenance of boundaries between themselves and others. To consume pork would be to lose their respective constructed Jewish identities and set-apartness of a holy people based on practice. Despite these women holding such strong views on this issue, Jewish practice makes it quite clear that being Jewish has a biological basis since to be born of a Jewish woman means that one automatically inherits Jewish identity. And yet, to be an observant or practicing Jew is tied to the abstinence from eating pork. A leitmotif throughout this section has been the expression of boundary-maintenance practices through the divisions of food, of things in the home, and of space, particularly in the kitchen, which demonstrate the complex arrangements associated with the prohibition on pork and the counterpart requirements of *kashrut* derived from an ancient heritage. Whether the participants are Orthodox or Reform in their theological and doctrinal interpretations of Judaism, what is unequivocally clear is that the pig is abominable for the observant Jews of Durban; whatever their arguments over the keeping of *kashrut* may be, one thing that is accepted by both these schools of practising Jews is that the pig remains excluded from their culinary habits. It is, therefore, the metonymic symbol of Jewish identity.

I have shown how *kashrut* laws begin in the home and are maintained through complex divisions of space and things in order to follow the requirements demanded by the dietary rules laid down in Judaism. What has emerged is that no matter how the practices and execution of *kashrut* may vary through different interpretations in individual Jewish kitchens, the pig remains a non-negotiable item of food and will therefore never be present on the tables of observant Jews.

While Jewish identity is so intrinsically tied up with its dietary laws and the realm of the divisions of food, space and things, the second most important marker of Jewish identity is related to the Sabbath, as a division of time and the sanctification thereof.

Sabbath

The Sabbath is known as *Shabbat* among the participants of this study. While the origins of Sabbath remain obscure (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:337) what is known is that among the exiled Jews of Babylonia Sabbath attained a prestigious position; for Jews not only observed a stricter Sabbath but the Sabbath became one of the practices, like circumcision, that was a sign which distinguished Jews from their non-Jewish environment (Schauss 1938:7). The institution of the Sabbath was based on two factors. The first had to do with a humanitarian motive which called for rest for all people and also the ox and the ass. The second was religious; Jews were prohibited to work on the seventh day which was sanctified to maintain their holiness as a people whose god was holy (ibid.:10). The abstention from work is the method by which holiness and set-apartness is preserved.

When setting up appointments with Jewish participants in this study I recall that it was virtually impossible to contact any Jewish person in Durban after lunch on Friday afternoon. Most of the phones went directly to a recorded message system or in a few cases there were servants taking messages. It was only after I had spoken to a few people that it became clear why I had trouble contacting anybody in the Jewish community; they were out and about preparing for the Sabbath which would begin at the sunset. Writing just before the Second World War, Schauss (1938:21) describes the pre-Sabbath atmosphere in Eastern Europe where Jews would begin as early as Thursday night to prepare for the Sabbath by gathering the food and kneading the dough for the *challah*, the Sabbath loaves, and lighting the fire very early on Friday morning to bake the bread and cook the special Sabbath dinner. And although Sabbath is interpreted in different ways by the different Jewish communities in present-day Durban, the essence and meaning of the Sabbath for the observant remains; that is, when the sun sets on Friday evening in the Jewish calendar, from which the beginning of the seventh day is marked[41], Jews observe the commandment to rest, to participate in worship, study the holy text, and feast on special Sabbath meals. Any secular work constitutes the crime of Sabbath breaking as articulated in the fourth commandment given by Moses. The initiation of the Sabbath, beginning at sunset on Friday, is a hallmark for practicing Jews in Durban and was often referred to as “Friday night” by the participants.

This pattern in their weekly observance of the Sabbath is a practice that separates sacred time from secular or ordinary time. Mircea Eliade, (1966:20-25) in his descriptions of the "modalities of the sacred" in the world, has said that "space is not homogenous" and that "some parts of space are qualitatively different from others". "There are other spaces", continues Eliade, "that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency" and are therefore "amorphous". "Revelation of a sacred space makes it possible to obtain a fixed point and hence acquire orientation in the chaos of homogeneity. For profane experience, on the contrary, space is homogenous and neutral; no break qualitatively differentiates the various parts of its mass."

Following Eliade (1966), it may be argued that the "modalities of the sacred" take the form of time being hallowed in the celebration of the Sabbath; sacred time breaks from profane time thereby breaking the homogeneity of time. The Sabbath, I argue, "qualitatively differentiates" between the ordinary days of the week and the sacred day which is honoured through observation. In the economics of divinity the division and separation of space and time is what differentiates the sacred from the mundane and the routine.

The Sabbath is a special observation as it harks back to the covenant god made with the Jews as his chosen people. The response of the Jews in Durban to this agreement is in recognition of the creative powers of god over nature and humans. The formulation "we are chosen" came up as a diagnostic sign of a privilege – as something that they alone are and don't really mind not sharing this with anybody else. Rachel Goldstone, a retired woman who is now involved in community work, spoke of Sabbath that she and her family have been keeping for many years now and considers the traditions of Friday night as being the most special thing about being Jewish and repeats the emotion she feels when she says: "Such a privilege, such a privilege".[42] Aaron Brody, who enjoys the tradition of Sabbath and the consequences of a Friday night in bringing family together, says of his non-Jewish family who don't have such an institution: "I think that they are a little jealous of what we got going in terms of Sabbath".[43]

Friday night is preceded by extensive preparation for the day of rest following. The commandment to "remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy" is pronounced over a cup of wine both at the inauguration of the Sabbath, the *Kiddush*, and at the termination, the *Havdalah*, in order to emphasise its distinctiveness from other days of the week (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1966:337).[44]

The obligation to light special candles rests on the woman of the house who pronounces a special blessing on the occasion.

It may be argued that alongside the exclusion of the pig, the observance of Sabbath is considered one of the clearest identifiers of what a Jew does, and who a Jew is.

In the observance of the Sabbath festival some of the major differences between Orthodox and Reform Jews are revealed. The technological advancements made in the world have raised questions pertaining to Jewish practice that were possibly not thought of and therefore not addressed in the classical *halakhic* texts. The classical texts, for example, outline the different prohibitions associated with the kindling of fire particularly on the Sabbath. With the advent of electricity the subject had to be re-opened for consideration and "rabbis were forced to struggle to master an understanding of the working of the electric light and its similarities or differences from the candle or electric lamp" (Unterman 1981:125-6). As Unterman (ibid.) says, the technical comprehension of the rabbis was sometimes incomplete and some rulings on kindling a fire were invalidated when *halakhists* gained greater technical knowledge.

To switch or not to switch on the lights

The difference between the Reform and Orthodox denominations lies in their interpretation of what constitutes rest, and the consequences this interpretation has for how Jews interpret the Sabbath. To switch or not to switch on a light is one of the most debatable and contested subjects of the Sabbath, and both groups approach the matter with a rationale that in essence fits with the general way they conceive and practice their brand of Judaism.

The Orthodox Jews generally interpret the biblical injunction of refraining from work on the Sabbath to include the prohibition on the driving of a motor vehicle. The ignition of a vehicle is akin to the lighting of a fire and this is considered forbidden in rabbinic wisdom.

Samuel Ezra, an orthodox Jew, and similarly others in this study, lives close enough to the synagogue so that he can take the commandment not to drive on the Sabbath very seriously. He therefore walks to and back from the synagogue during the Sabbath, thus fulfilling the commandments. However, he is happy to accept a lift back to his home at the termination of the Sabbath on Saturday.[45]

Contrasted with Samuel, Milka Rothschild, a Reform Jew, is aware that the bible admonishes Jews to rest on the Sabbath, but because it doesn't specify what kind of work one is to abstain from, the question remains open for her. It was only after the biblical period, she argues, that the rabbis put together a list of thirty nine categories of rest. However, she is aware that there are many interpretations of what constitutes work and what does not. Milka's interpretation of the Sabbath, however, is very tied up with separating that which is sacred from that which is profane in all the activities she conducts. For example, in her practice of the Sabbath she always tries to avoid those things that she would do on every other ordinary day of the week, thereby distinguishing between the mundane and the differentiated Sabbath observance. For example, she will not go to the shops on the Sabbath because she knows she can reserve this activity for the following day. However, Milka will drive on the Sabbath and she will switch on the lights, and in all her activities, she says:

> I try and make a distinction between what is sacred and what is profane.[46]

For Caleb Rosenthal, the traditions and practices of Judaism developed over many years, especially in the shtetls and ghettos, where Jews were "over-enclosed and over-concentrated", and these traditions were a way of protecting them from the outside. Caleb says that there are so many ritual practices and where such a "smorgasbord" of practices exist, there should be some consideration given as to which practices to keep and which to discard and this, he argues, can only be done after acquiring knowledge about them. He, therefore, has no problem doing the things that the Orthodox consider forbidden:

> I drive to Shul. I switch on the lights.[47]

Isaac Davidson, who lives 35 kilometres away from the synagogue (and that would be his choice as a Reformed Jew), naturally has to drive to the synagogue on Friday night. Yet Isaac keeps a kosher home with the meticulousness of an Orthodox Jew, but he does not see what the two practices have to do with each other. The problem, he says, is that the rabbis of the progressive congregations know that many people drive to the synagogue and they will not question it because they are afraid that people wouldn't show at the services and be cut off from the religious life of the community. However, there are certain things he would adhere to at the onset of the Sabbath, like switching off his phone, and not using his computer, though he will not leave his lights at home on. What Isaac refers to when he says "I don't leave my lights on..." is that many Jews leave their lights on from the

beginning of the Sabbath until the end without technically performing the task of switching on the light. What infuriates Isaac more than leaving the lights on for the duration of the Sabbath is that some Jews will invite non-Jews to switch on the lights for them.[48]

However, there are changes taking place in Durban; Orthodox Jews were, at the time of my fieldwork there, establishing a new community in Umhlanga, which is rapidly becoming a residential and business space which extends the city of Durban northwards. Leah Harris, who works extensively with the Jewish Board of Deputies and who was very involved in this project, was looking at the "sustainability of the community" in "meaningful ways" for the new community there. One of the problems they foresaw was that many people who relocated to Umhlanga could not possibly attend Shul in Essenwood Road, Overport, especially if it meant they had to walk there. There are other considerations, too, that Leah raised which pointed to all the other facilities that would be necessary to put into place so that the observant Jew may be able to fulfil the commandments and keep the community intact. For many people, she says, this is a difficult time because people are "apprehensive" about "change" and the "future".[49]

Rapid change in urban landscapes can have enormous effects on community and in extreme circumstances may even cause dislocation and disharmony in practising communities, bringing changes to how certain practices, such as the Sabbath, are observed.

Special foods on Sabbath

The Sabbath meal is really something that has grown and developed out of the rules pertaining to Sabbath observation. The injunction to rest and remove a Jew from his control over the natural and social world meant that all work was forbidden. Apart from refraining from work in its modern equivalent, one of the most important areas from which Jews refrain from is the kindling of a fire – which extended to electric power – which Orthodox Jews maintain falls under the biblical prohibition (Unterman 1981:171). This means that since no cooking may be undertaken during the Sabbath, food must be prepared before the start of the Sabbath and maintained on a warm stove or oven overnight to be eaten as a midday meal.[50] The form of the dish prepared required a recipe and method of cooking that would endure a long, slow heat, and the contents in the pot resemble the identity of the Jews through its ingredients. As such it would be only food that is acceptable for Jewish consumption. The meal itself, then, is differentiated from other meals served during the week, keeping with the differentiation of time on the Sabbath. The Ashkenazi Sabbath stew or

cholent is a dish most familiar to the Jews of Durban, reflecting the menu and recipes of their forebears of Eastern Europe. This meal is probably the most resonant and redolent material expression of the Sabbath and is probably a good example of what Lévi-Strauss has termed "endo-cuisine" (1979) – that is, food that cultivates a sense of the self and the group of people who have similar ideals.

According to Milka Rothschild, Jewish dietary laws are really for everyday of the week rather than just special occasions, but the Sabbath meal is "a special meal" and "every effort is made" to keep it out of the ordinary. Just as Christians have a turkey at Christmas, says Milka, and it would be unusual to have a turkey at any other time of the year, so too with the Jews at Sabbath. The general trend among observant Jews appears to be something that can be cooked on a very slow oven or stove so that it may be eaten warm the following day. Chicken soup is ubiquitous; "lots of Jewish homes boil the chicken first to make a soup, then they take the chicken out and either roast it or stew it".[51]

Most of the participants who had been raised in Jewish households seem to have no difficulty cooking from memory, mostly cooking Jewish food the way their mothers had done it. However, with inter-marriage, especially where the woman converts to Judaism, there is some difficulty in acquiring the Jewish heritage of cooking that appears so natural to those who grew up with it. Jewish cooking appears to be so complex; it's not just the passing down of recipes for a particular dish but it is about knowing what to cook for every occasion, and knowing what foods are associated with what festivals, while holding in suspension the requirements and laws of *kashrut*. This may be very difficult for a novice to the practices of Judaism and this may be the place for the use of cookbooks; that is, when the memory fails or when one has never grown up with Jewish food and cooking.

When cooking, which is so intrinsic to Jewish life, is a chore even for Jewish women then they rely on their servants to help. When Rebekah Adam converted to Judaism, she elicited the help of her mother-in-law who initially trained her in the ways of the Jewish kitchen and gave her recipes to help her along her newly chosen path. Rebekah however, dislikes the kitchen – a fact she thinks is odd since being a Jewish woman and the kitchen seem inseparable – but is expected to keep the Sabbath. So Rebekah sent her servant to Jewish cooking classes and she now makes the *challah* and produces all the food for the Sabbath meal having acquired a full knowledge of *kashrut*.[52]

Others like Tamar Rubenstein, who converted to Judaism, made full use of the community through the Jewish sisterhood; by getting involved in this association she was able to watch and learn the various aspects of Jewish cooking from the women who were experienced in such matters. These "old ladies", she says, have been there for fifty years and they can cook Jewish food with "their eyes closed". Tamar's lively story of her experiences in the kitchen tell a lot about some of the difficulties experienced by those who convert and the trouble they would go through to get results to please the expectations of seasoned Jewish eaters and find acceptance for their culinary endeavours among the community:

> They would show me how to decorate the chopped herring or the way to make a perfect *kichel*. And you try and you don't get it right and you watch and you learn and you think I don't really like my soup like that; I prefer her soup. And then you make your own. The chicken soup is really a big deal and it takes a whole flipping day to make it and it has got to be clear.[53]

She ends with a flourish by throwing her hands in the air.

What Tamar's story also reveals is that to convert to a religion like Judaism is not simply about going through the rigors of Torah study and the acceptance of its written beliefs; it is about imbibing the entire culture and habits of a people as well, especially through its culinary practices. And sometimes not learning certain cultural practices at mother's knee means that conversions to a system other than the one the individual has grown up with may have the implication that the individual may not become very good at it or struggles to acquire certain practices. The story of Leah Harris, mentioned above, whose parents assimilated into German society is a case in point. When Leah claimed and adopted her biological right to Judaism, she found that it is very difficult to make Jewish food in the prescribed manner: "I have never cooked Jewish food and I have never seen it been cooked". Leah realised "how little she knew", and in her pursuit of learning discovered that "it is one thing to learn from people who learn from birth", who assume much, and another to learn from those who have not known Jewish cooking from a Jewish household.[54]

These stories perhaps bring out the general problems associated with conversion to Judaism. Milka, who teaches conversion classes at the Reform school, witnesses the difference between those who are born Jewish and those who are converting. One thing she has noticed is that when she talks about childhood memories and "the way grannies did things", usually the Jewish partners' faces

would light up whereas the converts "will never have that". While converts, she argues, might well have a "deeper academic" and "a kind of intellectual knowledge of what they are doing...they are not just doing because mom did it and granny did it. They understand why they are doing it".[55]

Bahloul (1995:488) has captured the essence of the Sabbath meal when she argues that the food presented at this festival "is designed to remind eaters of the rules of Leviticus and of their symbolic meaning" as if the food represents the "practical system" of "reading" the Torah. These ideas tie in with the participants who are suggesting, too, that food on the Sabbath, and Jewish food generally, is imbued with Jewish culture and practice, linking biblical text and practice.

Community and marriage

Community, for Jews in Durban, is defined by certain principles, such as, to live in close proximity to other Jews and the synagogue; to maintain certain communal activities; to hold common beliefs and practices, whether Reform or Orthodox; and to have an organisational structure. In the Jewish community, these principles are very tangible and evidently something that all Jews want to preserve and maintain in order to continue a particular kind of community. From the data, it is clear that the Jews of Durban have consolidated themselves as a community, having established various religious congregations, communal institutions, and cemeteries, and having made extensive provisions for the daily maintenance of *kashrut* and the weekly maintenance of the Sabbath, other festivals, and important life-cycle rituals such as marriage, birth, adulthood and death. These acts, while they are sanctified by prayer and ritual, are also social acts requiring community participation.

While there are doctrinal differences that keep Orthodox and Reform Jews apart there are commonly held beliefs and practices that keep them united. These include, among others, the forbidden pig, *kashrut* in its various interpretations, the weekly Sabbath, and very importantly, their common history which gives them a common purpose. Also, the problem of anti-Semitism[56], which was mentioned in passing by a few participants, has the effect of bolstering and strengthening community bonds whenever it raises its head in the world, and Jews in Durban put away their theological differences and stand as one undifferentiated community.

Marriage is considered to be a fundamental institution among Jews in order that children may be produced and the commandments may be effectively carried out. Because the Durban Jews are small in number, children in marriage are a natural way of augmenting community membership.

Hence correct and proper alliances are encouraged. Therefore it was quite natural, in keeping with these views, when Jewish women in this study expressed their desire to have good Jewish partners for their children. "I would love my sons to marry beautiful Jewish girls", says Abigail.[57] Similarly, Rebekah says, "I would like the girl to be Jewish" for her son who was considering taking a wife.[58] The correct alliances would beget the correct grandchildren, as Tamar says when I asked her if she was concerned about her children's marriage partners:

> I would really love to have Jewish grandchildren.[59]

It is through the mother that Jewish identity is conferred on her offspring. It is therefore important and necessary for the woman who marries a Jewish man, and in order to produce Jewish children, to be Jewish. And because by definition a Jew is one that keeps the commandments or *mitzvoth*, offers exclusive devotion to the monotheistic god of the Jews, and is well-integrated into the Jewish community, it is incumbent for the eligible Jew to choose a suitable partner.

However, Durban has a small Jewish community and endogamous marriages are not always possible. It has therefore become necessary for potential marriage partners to convert to Judaism. Many participants have expressed their wish to have Jewish partners for their children and often this was accompanied by the fact that they didn't mind if their partners converted to Judaism provided that the conversion process preceded marriage. Leah Harris, for example, made the point that marriages are by their very nature difficult in themselves and that to be married to a person from a different religious and cultural background could lead to marital distress, particularly when children arrive and the commandments are not understood and where there is resistance to the implementation of such injunctions:

> Suddenly the children need to be circumcised and the unconverted partner responds, ooh no, that's too barbaric.[60]

One of the mechanisms used by Jews in Durban is to send their children to Jewish schools, thereby exposing them to ideas, attitudes and values of the general community. As Alan Unterman (1981:13) says, its purpose is "meant to cushion the effect of the gentile environment", boost "social contact with fellow Jews, limit the prospect of inter-marriage, and provide a modicum of Jewish education". However, the problem in Durban again relates to the size of the Jewish population; being small they were unable to sustain purely Jewish schools. As a result many Jewish children attend private and

other streams of education or what some participants have called “mixed” schools which are meant for the general public. While these schools are “competitive” and are reputed for their “academic prowess”, as Leah says, Jewish children, however, are mixing with non-Jews and this is conflicting with what Jewish children are being told in their homes. And yet Leah says that it is the “Muslim kids” who are going home and saying to their parents that they want to go on holiday with a friend and he is Jewish “and the Muslims are going wooeee, I don’t know”.[61]

In a city like Durban where the Jewish community is very small, Jewish children are meeting many non-Jews and the chances of Jewish children meeting and marrying non-Jewish partners is increasing greatly. This may in due course encourage inter-marriage and have adverse effects on community adhesiveness and boundaries.

Conclusion

It was evident that the extensive prohibitions in Judaism most particularly of the pig, give rise to prescriptions. These lead to the complex system of ordering, separating, and dividing things in the home through the intricacies observed in the practice of *kashrut,* the weekly Sabbath, and marriage, and are the categories of boundary-maintenance activities that confer on Jews in Durban their particular identities. These practices are the underpinnings of their beliefs which are carried out through the careful and meticulous ordering of time and space and through which their social and religious identities remain resistant to mixing with others. It was also evident that these categories of activities structure their lives into a relatively intact community, differentiating between those who belong and who those who do not belong.

Endnotes

[1] Adam, Rebekah. 13th October 2010, p6. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[2] Rothschild, Milka. 25th October 2010, p2. Interview at The Temple David, Ridge Road: Durban.
[3] Levine, Hannah. 20th October 2010, p5. Interview at her home in Ridge Road: Durban.
[4] Rosenthal, Caleb. 22nd October 2010, p8. Interview at his home in La Lucia: Durban.
[5] Goldstone, Rachel. 7th October 2010, p3. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[6] Ezra, Samuel. 21st October 2010, p7. Interview at the Pick n Pay Kosher Butchery, Musgrave Road: Durban.
[7] Silberman, Abigail. 21st October 2010, p3. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban. Abigail is now vegetarian but this expresses her view when she did consume meat.
[8] Rubenstien, Tamar. 25th October 2010, p9. Interview at her home in Hillcrest: Durban.
[9] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p10. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[10] Pollard, Gabriel. 14th October 2010, p2. Interview at the Mugg & Bean Restaurant, Musgrave Road: Durban.
[11] Freeman, Devorah. 25th October 2010, p6. Interview at her home in Glenwood: Durban.
[12] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p10. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.

[13] Susan Starr Sered (1988:134) writing about her fieldwork among the middle-Eastern Jewish women found that because they do very little dairy cooking, the separation of milk and meat is not so much of a concern. Yet, they empty out the sink between washing the dishes from the meat dinner and the spoons and cups from the breakfast coffee and yoghurt.
[14] Andrew Buckser (1999:201) writing on the Jews in Denmark has raised a similar issue: carelessness in the kitchen can be caused by any member of the family. For example, when milk dishes are placed on meat dishes; when the wrong utensils are used; or, if the washing up was done with the wrong brush. These kinds of accidents, he argues, can defile the food for everyone in the family.
[15] Ezra, Samuel. 21st October 2010, p2. Interview at the Pick n Pay Kosher Butchery, Musgrave Road: Durban.
[16] Levine, Hannah. 20th October 2010, p5. Interview at her home in Ridge Road: Durban.
[17] Jocelyn Hellig(1984:103) writing of Orthodox Judaism in South Africa says there are varying degrees of observance or the lack of it. Some Jews, she argues, keep kosher homes but are not averse to the idea of eating non-kosher food outside the home; in her survey she found that 59 per cent of households eat kosher foods sometimes and 27 per cent of that number eat only kosher foods; others do not find kosher-keeping relevant.
[18] Kosminsky, Abraham. 22nd October 2010, p6. Interview at Eden College, Glenmore: Durban.
[19] Davidson, Isaac. 20th October 2010, p6. Interview at The National Society of the Arts Gallery Restaurant, Bulwer Road: Durban.
[20] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p2-3. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[21] ibid.:3.
[22] Goldstone, Rachel. 7th October 2010, p6. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[23] Rothchild, Milka. 25th October 2010, p6-7. Interview at The Temple David, Ridge Road: Durban.
[24] Rosenthal, Caleb. 22nd October 2010, p7-8. Interview at his home in La Lucia: Durban North, Durban.
[25] Joelle Bahloul (1995:494) writing about the culinary practices of Sephardic immigrants in France has called the "oriental" grocery store and the kosher butcher the ante-chamber of the home kitchen.
[26] Ezra, Samuel. 21st October 2010, p2. Interview at the Pick n Pay Kosher Butchery, Musgrave Road: Durban.
[27] ibid.:4.
[28] Davidson, Isaac. 20th October 2010, p6. Interview at The National Society of the Arts Gallery Restaurant, Bulwer Road: Durban
[29] Levine, Hannah. 20th October 2010, p4. Interview at her home in Ridge Road: Durban.
[30] ibid.:5.
[31] Rosenthal, Caleb. 22nd October 2010, p8. Interview at his home in La Lucia: Durban.
[32] Rothschild, Milka. 25th October 2010, p2. Interview at The Temple David, Ridge Road: Durban.
[33] When Tamar Rubenstein wanted to convert to Judaism she first approached the Orthodox synagogue in Durban who initially vehemently discouraged her. Later, through her persistence, the Orthodox rabbi, then in charge, accepted her with certain restrictions; her husband, who is a Jew, had to attend Shul, they had to walk and not drive on the Sabbath, and they had to refrain from work on the Sabbath. These restrictions were impossible for Tamar and her husband who is a cardiologist and who has to see patients on the Sabbath as well. She became a Reformed Jew, and chose to live in Hillcrest, a long way from the synagogue (Rubenstein: 25th October 2010, p3. Interview at her home in Hillcrest: Durban).
[34] Rubenstein, Tamar. 25th October 2010, p10. Interview at her home in Hillcrest: Durban.
[35] ibid.:9.
[36] Rothschild, Milka. 25th October 2010, p2. Interview at The Temple David, Ridge Road: Durban.
[37] Adam, Rebekah. 13th October 2010, p6. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[38] Bacon is a meat product which is derived from the back and sides of a pig. It is first cured using large quantities of salt either in brine or in dry packaging.
[39] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p10. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[40] Rothschild, Milka. 25th October 2010, p2. Interview at The Temple David, Ridge Road: Durban.
[41] In the critical study of the Bible, it was generally accepted that the recurring phrase in Genesis, "and it was evening and it was morning", means that when the day passes into evening and then night into morning, a complete day may be measured. But the Talmudic tradition (the literary elaboration and elucidation of the precepts of the *Torah* which gained its impetus in the Babylonian exile) interpreted this to mean that night precedes day. For religious purposes the day begins at sunset and ends on sunset the following day. The Sabbath, therefore, begins at sunset on Friday and ends on sunset on Saturday (Jacobs 1987:42).
[42] Goldstone, Rachel. 7th October 2010, p6. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[43] Brody, Aaron. 25th October 2010, p2. Interview at his work in Umbilo Road: Durban.

[44] Wine was used by the ancient Israelite priests to consecrate the altar when making sacrifices to god and has for centuries been used to foster a sense of community affiliation at such religiously significant occasions such as the Sabbath meal, the Seder meal during Passover, the celebration of a *bris*, and at weddings (Fuller 1995:499).
[45] Ezra, Samuel. 21st October 2010, p5. Interview at the Pick n Pay Kosher Butchery, Musgrave Road: Durban.
[46] Rothschild, Milka. 25th October 2010, p2-3. Interview at The Temple David, Ridge Road: Durban
[47] Rosenthal, Caleb. 22nd October 2010, p8. Interview at his home in La Lucia: Durban.
[48] Davidson, Isaac. 20th October 2010, p2. Interview at The National Society of the Arts Gallery, Bulwer Road: Durban.
[49] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p5. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[50] According to Schauss (1938:32), since the period of the second Temple, it was customary for Jews to keep food warm in materials that retained heat. Heat is not allowed to be added on the Sabbath but the retaining of it is acceptable.
[51] Rothschild, Milka. 25th October 2010, p1. Interview at The Temple David, Ridge Road: Durban.
[52] Adam, Rebekah. 13th October 2010, p3. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[53] Rubenstein, Tamar. 25th October 2010, p7. Interview at her home in Hillcrest: Durban.
[54] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p3. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[55] Rothschild, Milka. 25th October 2010, p3. Interview at The Temple David, Ridge Road: Durban.
[56] The problem of anti-Semitism is not the purview of this thesis because it was neither a question I had asked the participants and nor did it recur as a regular theme in my data. It is therefore not elaborated on. It is perceived by Jews as something that exists and threatens the rights of Jews in Durban as indeed Jews throughout the world (see Schwarz 1984:134 ff).
[57] Silberman, Abigail. 21st October 2010, p5. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[58] Adam, Rebekah. 13th October 2010, p3. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[59] Rubenstein, Tamar. 25th October 2010, p5. Interview at her home in Hillcrest: Durban.
[60] Harris, Leah. 6th October 2010, p6. Interview at the Durban Jewish Centre: Durban.
[61] ibid.:11.

Conclusion

The impulse for this study arose while working with different religions at a national broadcaster, where I developed a feeling for dialogue among the various groups. I found myself wondering about why certain religions exclude certain foods that are quite edible; it was not only their religious injunctions I was interested in, but the efficacy of such exclusions on group identity. When choosing a topic for my thesis I therefore decided to study two religions, Judaism and Hinduism, in which the exclusion of certain foods was central to their respective practices.

While I grew up in Durban as part of the Hindu community there, and am therefore very familiar with the city, I have not lived there for the past twenty years, and no longer practise any form of institutional religion. This was therefore not my motivation for situating my study there. Rather, the biggest factor influencing my decision was the fact that Durban has a large Hindu community who are, nevertheless, a minority within the larger population. More importantly though, the rich links that Hindu families have to their ancestral past confirmed for me the importance of locating my study in Durban. The city also has a small Jewish community, and while there are more Jews in both Cape Town and Johannesburg, they constituted a large enough entity to allow me to conduct a comparative study of these two religious groups in Durban.

The thesis which I have since developed is a sociological and religious studies investigation of the persistence of minority identities in a cross-cultural modern state. South Africa, as a tri-continental society, with a population originating from Africa, Europe and Asia, was an ideal place to open up such a discussion. Using the qualitative research method, the study was based on thirty four interviews with fourteen observant Jewish and twenty observant Hindu practitioners in Durban in order to provide a sociological perspective of their dietary exclusions, notably the pig and the cow, respectively, and to investigate how these are maintained in order to preserve their religious and social identities. These participants were representative of a broad spectrum of people, from rabbis and swamis to ordinary lay members in both practising communities.

The nature of my enquiry required qualitative research involving case studies of observant Jews and Hindus. I began by reading extensively in the relevant literature, then set about selecting my thirty four participants and conducting in-depth interviews with them to ascertain their views and practices with regard to their dietary habits.

While my Jewish participants regarded me fairly straightforwardly as an outsider doing academic research, many of my Hindu participants saw me as one of them, especially as I was using my Indian maiden name of Govender, and were concerned to know what my beliefs were. Perhaps this helped to create a bond between us that allowed a few participants to talk to me about some of their deepest religious feelings, which in some instances they had never spoken to anyone about.

My interviews lasted, generally, between two and three hours, and a few ran longer than that. In the process I accumulated two sets of comprehensive data relating to the two groups my thesis deals with, Jews and Hindus. This was demanding work, as I had to research the sometimes very different roles of food in two very diverse religions, and then develop the two very different sets of data into a coherent narrative.

I had assumed at the outset, perhaps naively, that the data would be similar, especially since I had premised my work on the fact that both groups exclude certain animals from consumption. However, while this may be a common denominator for the two groups, each of them has an entire set of prescriptions that they keep in order to maintain their identities, so that what they do and how they do it, and the different issues emerging in both the groups in their response to issues of modernity in contemporary Durban, are very different and resulted in very different data sets.

Requiring a definition of religion as my starting point, I argued for Émile Durkheim's definition, though as I elaborate below, it turned out to have certain drawbacks. The definition states that where there is a system of beliefs and practices having taboos, which for Durkheim is the formula for social integration, there is no unwarranted mixing of the sacred and profane dualities.

Having clarified the issue of what constitutes a religion, one of the main theoretical issues this thesis dealt with involved concepts of purity and pollution. I have used Mary Douglas' (1966) theory on purity and pollution extensively to analyse the exclusion of the pig and the cow from the diets of Jews and Hindus, respectively.

For Douglas, the Jewish abomination of the pig results from the fact that it is matter out of place, and not because it is dirty in pathogenic terms: it is out of place because it does not fit the cherished Jewish biblical categories. When I applied this idea to the Jews in Durban, I showed that the pig is, indeed, an abomination for this reason.

The high value originally ascribed to the cow in Vedic times when it was accorded deep respect, but was also ritually sacrificed, would eventually lead, through the influence of Buddhism and Jainism and their concept of *ahimsa*, to its inviolability among the higher castes. This would later filter down to most other castes. It was evident that among the Hindus in Durban this deep respect for the cow, and its inviolability, persists, and extends to the material and ritual benefits of its by-products – most especially milk, *ghee* and curd.

The avoidance of these animals, and religious relationships with them, have been explained and illuminated by insights into why humans are induced to divide things, to classify and categorise, and to understand the general relationship of man to things (Durkheim and Mauss 1903/1963).

Within this theoretical framework I have examined why or how these animals become excluded from consumption, and what the consequences of this are. A major theme which emerges repeatedly throughout the thesis is that where religions create proscriptions for their religious adherents, there will also be prescriptions that lay down particular practices which must be adhered to in order to preserve and maintain group identity.

It is worth noting that while the proscriptions of the two religions I studied may seem onerous to outsiders, the practitioners generally did not regard them as such. It emerged, instead, that their prescriptions, the strict set of requirements to which the respective practitioners must adhere in order to maintain the exclusions and to separate the sacred from the profane, are in fact far more complex, and far more difficult to comply with, than the apparently demanding dietary exclusions.

The end-result of this work was that my hypothesis – that the beliefs and practices of Jews and Hindus, based on the exclusion of the pig and the cow from the dietary practices of these two groups, respectively, resulted in the creation of niche identities – was proved to be correct. However, I ended up taking a route, or rather two separate routes for the two religions under investigation that I had never anticipated. In addition, I found myself taking some unexpected detours, a small one for the Jews, but some extensive detours for the Hindus, with the consequence that I have had to amend the theories of Douglas and Durkheim, and perhaps more fundamentally, to note that contrary to widespread perceptions, remnants of caste practice are still to be found among Hindus in Durban.

It was very clear that there are differing Hindu traditions and practices in Durban, and that there is no single Hindu tradition there. The primary division is between the traditional Sanathanist and Bhakti forms of devotion, and the four neo-Hindu movements active in Durban. Within these traditions, the varieties of pieties and devotional styles makes the umbrella term Hinduism, which describes all these practices as if they are a single phenomenon, essentially inadequate.

However, the cultic practices of these groups are in some respects broadly similar, encompassing rituals for ancestors, life-cycle rituals, the honouring of deities with *puja*, festivals, and calendar practices, as well as emphasising the importance of ablutions and correct dress. The Hindus who originally settled in Durban from India were a diverse group in belief and practice; they had no central form of worship that existed around a temple of a communal nature, and home altars were therefore at the centre of their devotional rites.

These early Hindus also lacked any form of social or political organisation. I argue that it was the neo-Hindu movements which played a significant role in homogenising the group through its leadership and organisational elements. The role of the Maha Sabha was also important in helping Hindus to institutionalise holy days, and to structure calendar practices.

The Jews, as I have shown, arrived in South Africa to escape pogroms and the hardships of poverty in Eastern Europe, and made their way to Durban. Although Jews were politically assimilated into the dominant colonial society, they were given every encouragement to reconstruct and pursue their religious practices, and thus retained their distinct identity. They were consequently able to follow their religious injunctions and practices continued from their homeland, where the abomination of the pig remained central in their understanding of the commandments.

I have argued extensively that Jewish identity is constructed around this exclusion of the pig, supported by the daily practice of *kashrut*, the weekly observance and maintenance of Sabbath, and the various injunctions given to preserve and foster the religious community, which are perpetuated through marriage and children. These, for Jews, are the core aspects of their identity in Durban. Jewish identity is conferred by the mother on her children, thus ensuring the continuity of Judaism. However, given the small size of the Jewish community there, the issue of inter-marriage, together with the mandatory conversion of prospective marriage partners into the religious system, has blurred boundaries of Jewish identity where fully endogamous marriages are difficult to maintain.

By their own definition of themselves, as one participant has said, they regard themselves as a single people with a single history, whether they are from Yemen or Iraq or Lithuania. Yet these definitions of themselves become altered because of inter-marriage and conversions, altering genealogies and denaturalising the Jewish woman.

Conversion is similarly an issue for Hindus, but in a very different way. It is not conversion into the fold that is the problem, but conversion out of Hinduism to other religions, notably Christianity. There are a number of reasons explaining these conversions, which relate to, among other things, historical factors in settlement and the establishment of their religious practices, such as a lack of trained clergy, frequent urban dislocation when temples were destroyed, and economic pressures to convert for better job prospects. It seems that through the influence of the neo-Hindu movements and the Hindu organisational body, the Maha Sabha, Hindus are gaining a better understanding of their religion and the confidence to espouse it, creating a Hindu *esprit de corps*. This appears to have had the effect of slowing conversions out of Hinduism. It was evident also that within the various religious groupings there is an understanding of the need to establish good relations between priest and congregants, hitherto missing in the Sanathanist and Bhakti traditions, and to emphasise regular corporate worship.

The early sociological studies on Hindus in Durban (Kuper 1960 and Meer 1969) claimed that caste and caste structure had disappeared, apparently since it was of little value to immigrants who were predominantly of lower caste (Singh 2003). In addition, there was no evidence in my data that caste still survives in its functional form, or that it still operates as a system of classification which determines social and religious structures. Nevertheless, well into my work on this thesis I came to the conclusion that remnants of certain caste practices could be used to explain two phenomena in my data. These caste remnants are not overt or obvious to the casual observer or even to the participants themselves.

When I noticed that the importance of vegetarian practices among Durban Hindus had become a recurring theme in my data, I began to ask whether this might be related to historic caste practices. Coupled with this was the evidence that the cow is held in such high esteem and that its by-products, particularly milk, *ghee* and curd, are not only widely used in daily household cooking, but are compulsory for use in Hindu ritual. This veneration for the cow, and the emphasis on vegetarianism as a consequence of *ahimsa*, were values which had been particularly emphasised by

the higher castes in India, and were now being earnestly advocated by the majority of my participants, most especially by those belonging to the neo-Hindu movements.

I found further traces of caste practice in accounts by the participants showing that some Hindus in Durban used to eat the flesh of the cow. In the literature it has been pointed out (Pillay *et al*.) that the Hindu indentured labourers who came to Durban comprised mainly lower castes, with only a small number of high caste Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas among them. In India, some members of the lower castes who belonged to certain occupations were known to eat beef, and it is possible that this practice was continued in Durban by some of the new arrivals. Certainly, a few of my participants were quite open about the fact that they had only stopped eating beef when they converted to one of the neo-Hindu movements, which advocate vegetarianism and place great emphasis on the cow's inviolability.

It may be an interesting avenue of further research to enquire whether the Hare Krishna movement, in particular, has made a point of adopting high-caste practices and requiring all of its adherents, of whatever social background, to punctiliously observe these practices, thereby lifting all of them to the same high status of, for example, the priestly Brahmin caste.

The quintessential high-caste practice is veneration for the cow, and its inviolability results from this reverence. If one tries to explain its dietary exclusion in terms of Douglas' theory of purity and pollution, it becomes evident that her theory is inadequate. Her theory applies to the pig, which is abominable whether living or dead, and is therefore avoided in all its forms because it causes dissonance. The cow, on the other hand, presents a conundrum: it becomes unclean, polluting, and constitutes dirt when killed, and thus creates dissonance; but it is clean, and harmonises with that which is pure and sacred, when alive. Douglas' theory can only explain the cow as a polluting element, but not its sanctifying attributes.

While it was evident in the literature that defining religion defies consensus, and I may have been well advised to follow in the footsteps of Max Weber (1922) by choosing to reserve the definition of the phenomena I am studying for the end of this thesis, I nevertheless chose to use Durkheim because he highlighted the quintessential elements (beliefs, practices, interdictions, social integration) which I found readily in the two religions I was studying. However, I found much later, on close analysis of my data, that it is impossible to define Hinduism as a single religious system in Durban, however much they may have in common. It become clear that the early Hindus who

settled in Durban did not have any form of communal worship, and therefore lacked the element of social integration. In an earlier part of their religious history in Durban, Durkheim's definition was not suitable to explain what they nevertheless called their beliefs and practices which were mainly conducted in the privacy of the domestic altar. His definition holds for a later time when they consolidated their beliefs and practices, and established their identity in community through the role played by the neo-Hindu movements. It also became obvious that while Durkheim's definition is, at its core, about interdictions which produce the efficacy of separation and thereby lead to the formation of collective bodies and give them their cohesiveness, it cannot account in its definition for conversion, which produces the opposite effect on the group by fragmenting and weakening its collective identity.

There were a few ideas for further studies which emerged from this thesis. One of them relates to the dearth of information on Hindu temples in Durban. I relied quite heavily on Paul Mikula, Brian Kearney and Rodney Harber's (1982) book *Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa*. While it presents a comprehensive history about how temples were transplanted from India to Durban as well as other parts of the country, and is an excellent source for a novice student of temple architecture, such as myself, in understanding the structural elements of temples, further research is needed to include the neo-Hindu places of worship in Durban, which, from my observations, appear to stand in stark contrast to traditional Hindu temples.

A second line of enquiry which emerges from this study is the extensive use of food that is related to the cultic practices of Jews and Hindus. The pot, therefore, in keeping with Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of the pot as a "repository of identity", becomes synonymous with their respective identities. This would not only constitute an important study, but would at the same time preserve recipes handed down through generations.

Glossary

abhishekam	literally means anointment and refers to the ritual bath of the presiding deity or deities, with water and other ingredients.
ahimsa	the doctrine of non-injury to living creatures
arati	in Sanskrit is made up of the prefix '*aa*' meaning complete and '*rati*' meaning love. *Arati*, therefore, is the expression of one's complete love towards god. *Arati* is performed in a *puja* by devotees who turn a lit lamp with a circular movement before sacred images.
Arya Samaj	Hindu social reform organisation founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875 advocating a return to Vedic ideals which include among other things, the focus on one formless deity. The Arya Samaj condemned polytheism, the use of images, caste restrictions and child marriages. It supported widow re-marriage and female education.
Ashkenazi	Jew of central or East European origin.
avatar	an incarnation of the Supreme Being whose purpose is to destroy the wicked and impious and save the virtuous. According to the Hindu tradition, there have been nine *avatars* of Vishnu since creation and the tenth one is expected. The word *avatar* is from the Sanskrit *avatara* meaning descent.
bar-mitzvah	*bar* means "son" and mitzvah means "commandment". When put together it means "son of the commandment". It is a ritual ceremony marking the entry of a thirteen year old boy into the religious community of Judaism thus permitting him to perform the commandments.
bat-mitzvah	*bat* means "daughter" and mitzvah means "commandment". When put together it means "daughter of the commandment". It is a ritual ceremony marking the entry of a girl at twelve years of age into the religious community of Judaism thus permitting her to perform the commandments. This ceremony for girls is mainly a practice of Reform Judaism.
Bhagavad Gita	the sixth book of the *Mahabharata* assigned by scholars to the fourth century; a dramatic poem in the form of a dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna on the field of battle at Kurukshetra. Its philosophy is eclectic combining elements of the different schools of Hinduism: *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, and *Vedanta* systems with the later theory of *bhakti* devotion.
bhajans	congregational singing of hymns and songs
bhakti	devotional theologies and liturgies that asserted the centrality of love and devotion to its particular god as a sole means of attaining liberation. (See Sanathanist)
bimah	a raised platform in the middle of the synagogue on which a desk is placed for reading the Scroll of the law.
bris	from the Hebrew *brit milah*, "covenant of circumcision". The Yiddish word *bris* is derived from the Ashkenazi *bris milah*, which refers to the religious ceremony of circumcision held on the eighth day of life for Jewish male infants.
burfee	is a fudge-like confection made of cream, milk and sugar, for *puja*, festivals and celebrations.
challah	a braided egg-bread made especially for the Sabbath.
cholent	a slow-cooked stew of meat, potatoes, beans and barley served as a Sabbath meal.
darsana	means "auspicious seeing". When an image of a deity is prepared and placed on view in the home or temple, the deity makes himself or herself available to be seen by worshippers. The deity sees them and extends his or

	her grace to them.
dhal	is a Sanskrit word meaning to split. Hindus call many pulses that are dried and split, dhal, such as peas, lentils, and beans.
dhoti	a length of unstitched cloth that is wrapped around the waist of a man. The cloth is passed between the legs and tucked behind the waist. Dhotis are regarded as ritual garments for men usually made of white cotton.
Divali or Dipavali or Diwali	literally meaning a row of lights. One of the most important festivals in the Hindu calendar in Durban during October-November is based on various mythologies of triumphs and unions. The essence of this festival is the celebration of the triumph of light over darkness.
Gai mata	is the extolling of the cow's maternal qualities.
ghee or ghi	is clarified butter. As a by-product of the cow it is regarded as pure and sanctifies food prepared with this medium.
goolab jamuns	are rich finger shaped doughnuts made of flour, sugar, and spices, fried in ghee and drenched in rose-water syrup.
gopi outfit	is a popular dress among north Indian rural women. It is made up of a long gathered skirt or *ghagra,* a blouse fitting the bodice or *kanchali*, and a short sari that covers the back and head or *odhani*.
halakhic	from *halakhah* which means way or path. A body of Jewish legal writing on the subject of *halakhah*.
halwai	a member of the caste of confectioners in Northern India generally.
avdalah	the blessing made over a cup of wine at the termination of the Sabbath.
hawan or havan	from the Sanskrit *homa* meaning a ritual burning of offerings or *samagree* made into a consecrated fire to mark any occasion such as weddings, funerals, the birth of a child, and festivals.
incense	from the Latin *incendere*, to burn or kindle. The practice of using incense for religious rites has existed since ancient times in prayers to the gods, to ward off foul smells, appease the gods, and show reverence and respect.
Indus	original Sanskrit name: Sindhu River rising in Tibet and flowing into the Arabian Sea through Kashmir and the Punjab. It is one the sacred rivers for Hindus.
kachcha	food that is cooked with water. Pollution is more easily transmitted by this method of cooking than pakka food.
Kahar	a caste of fishermen, porters, and domestic servants in upper India. Kahars also commonly act as well-sinkers and cultivators of water-nuts.
kameez or kurta	a long Indian shirt that sits at or below the knees. It is worn with either short or long sleeves and accompanying trousers.
karma	the spiritual law of cause and effect which ensures that one's actions and intensions in a given lifetime will be rewarded or punished accordingly in future reincarnations.
kashrut	refer
kichel	a sweet cookie made from a dough consisting of eggs, sugar, flour, oil, and baking powder. They are usually eaten with something savoury.
kiddush	the blessing made over a cup of wine at the inauguration of the Sabbath or other religious holidays.
Kosher	
ludoo	is a ball-shaped confection made of chickpea flour, or semolina, sugar, coconut, and spices, for prayer, festivals and celebrations.

menorah	from the Hebrew “candelabrum” which has seven branches with sockets for holding candles used in the Sabbath and other festivals.
mezuzah	from the Hebrew meaning “doorpost”. A small parchment of paper is inscribed with a verse taken from the book of Deuteronomy: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one”. The paper is rolled tightly and placed in a small case which is attached to the top right hand side of the front door of Jewish homes and serves as a reminder of the omnipresence of God.
minyan	from the Hebrew meaning number: the minimum quorum of ten adult males required for the liturgical purposes.
mitzvah	from the Hebrew meaning “commandment”. Mitzvot is the plural. The word may be used in two ways, one technical, referring to the traditional 613 commandments given in the Bible, and the other general, referring to the rabbinic ordinances such as the washing of hands and the reciting of prayers and charitable acts.
murthi	image of a deity, god or goddess
pakka	food that is cooked in *ghee* or clarified butter. Because *ghee* is a by-product of the cow it sanctifies the food cooked with it.
neo-Vedanta	is an interpretation of Hinduism (also called neo-Hindu) that developed in the nineteenth century in response to western colonialism and orientalism, which reconciles Advaita (non-dualism) and Dvaita (dualism) among other theories of reality.
panchagavya	the five sacred products of the cow, namely, milk, *ghee*, curd, dung, and urine, is mixed together and eaten for the removal of severe pollution (acquired through the transgression of caste rules) among caste conscious Hindus. Less severe pollution may be removed by taking a bath and changing one’s clothes.
panchamrita	a mixture of milk, curd, ghee, honey, and sugar used to purify gods and human incarnations but *panchagavya* (above) is never used for the gods.
parveh	a Yiddish term applied to foods that are classified as neither milk or meat and which consequently may be eaten with either, without infringing the laws of *kashrut* which forbids the simultaneous consumption of these two foods.
prasadam	food sanctified by being offered to the deity propitiated which is thereafter eaten by the worshippers.
Puranas	are an ancient Hindu texts extolling the gods of the trinity, and deities, through sacred stories.
Rabbi	from the Hebrew “my master”. It is an honorific term originally used in Palestine when addressing sages, but gradually developed to refer to any person qualified to make decisions on Jewish law and ritual.
raita	is a condiment made of yoghurt and spices to which cucumber (or other salad vegetables) and fresh coriander are added.
Rajputs	an aristocratic caste, widespread in western, northern, and central India, whose traditional functions are fighting and ruling. They represent the ancient Kshatriya *varna*, and rank next to the Brahamans socially.
rigveda	the original compilation of Vedic hymns to nature deities. The Yajurvedas and the Samaveda were derived from it, and are chiefly concerned with sacrificial sayings and ceremonial.
roti	is a flat, round bread cooked on a *thava* or griddle.
Sabbath	the weekly day of rest on which profane work is not allowed observed from sunset on Friday until the onset on night on Saturday.

sadhu	from the Sanskrit *sadh* which means to "reach one's goals" or generally a good man or holy man. An ascetic or wandering monk who aspires to moksha through meditation and contemplation of Brahman. A sadhu wears a saffron robe which indicates his status as a renunciate.
salwar	a trousers that is loose-fitting around the stomach, hip and thigh, and snugly fitted around the lower leg. It is worn as an accompaniment to the *kameez* or *kurta*.
samagree	a mixture, among other ingredients, of natural, fragrant and medicinal herbs, rose petals, sandalwood powder, camphor, and turmeric, combined with combustibles such as dried mango wood and ghee, which is poured into a ritual fire or *hawan* as a religious offering.
sambhar	is a thick stew made of dhal and tamarind sauce. It is a popular dish in south India.
sanathana dharma	it means, literally, the Eternal Way; an ancient name given to the religion of the Hindus before it is called Hinduism.
Sanathanist	the term comes from Sanathana (see above) and refers to ritualistic, traditional Hindusim (as opposed to neo-Hinduism) mainly found among the Hindi-speaking Hindus. (See Bhakti)
satsangh	from *sat* which means truth and *sangh* which means association. Literally, it means the community of the true ones; the regular congregational worship typical of neo-Hinduism involving prayers, bhajans and kirtans, and discourses
sattvic	foods that are considered beneficial to the body and that are obtained without injury to animals.
Sefardi	Jew originally of Iberian origin.
Shaivas	worshippers in the tradition that crystallised around the God Shiva
Shaktas	worshippers of the Goddess, Shakti, as Supreme Being.
shtetl	was a small town with a large Jewish population in Central and Eastern Europe before the pogroms and the Holocaust.
shul	is a Yiddish word derived from the German word meaning "school". It is the centre of the Jewish religious community which emphasises the synagogue's role as a place of study and education.
sikha	the small tuft of hair on the shaved head of a Hare Krishna monk to distinguish him from monks of other orders.
terephah/traife	may refer to any defect which renders an animal unfit for consumption, or, to any food prepared contrary to dietary laws. In Durban the Yiddish word traife was commonly used to describe food that is unsuitable for consumption.
tilak	a traditional mark placed on the forehead to identify devotees as either followers of Krishna or Shiva. Vertical marks on the forehead would indicate a disciple of Krishna and three horizontal lines indicate disciples of Shiva. Among the Hare Krishna devotees the paste used for the tilak is obtained from a sacred place in India. It is worn to remind the wearer, and everyone else, that within the body resides the individual soul and the supreme soul, Krishna.
Torah	a Hebrew word meaning "teaching', "instruction", or "guidance". The first five books of the Hebrew scriptures.
utsavas	festivals
Vaishnaivas	worshippers in the tradition that crystallised around the God Vishnu
Vedanta	Hindu philosophy based on the Upanishads in its monistic form.
vedas	books of Divine Knowledge forming the earliest written records of

	Hinduism.
vrata	religious obligation usually involving a fast, a purificatory bath, and special worship.
yarmulka	a word of Polish origin adopted in Yiddish referring to a skull cap, distinguishing it from a hat. It is worn as a covering of the head in keeping with Orthodox Jewish custom. The Hebrew equivalent is called a *kippah*.

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Endnotes

[i]All Hindu names were changed to keep their linguistic and religious identities. For example, a Hindi-speaking Hindu is given a Hindi name, and the same applies to Tamil, Telegu and Gujerati speakers. Similarly, all Jewish names were changed to preserve the Jewish identities of the participants.