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Hindutva as a variant of right-wing extremism

EVIANE LEIDIG ⬛

ABSTRACT   Leidig's article addresses a theoretical and empirical lacuna by analysing Hindutva using the terminology of right-wing extremism. It situates the origins of Hindutva in colonial India where it emerged through sustained interaction with ideologues in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany who, in turn, engaged with Hindutva to further their own ideological developments. Following India's independence, Hindutva actors played a central role in the violence of nation-building and in creating a majoritarian identity. Yet Hindutva was not truly 'mainstreamed' until the election of the current prime minister, Narendra Modi, in 2014. In order to construct a narrative that furthered Hindu insecurity, Modi mobilized his campaign by appealing to recurring themes of a Muslim 'threat' to the Hindu majority. The result is that Hindutva has become synonymous with Indian nationalism. Leidig seeks to bridge the scholarly divide between, on the one hand, the study of right-wing extremism as a field dominated by western scholars and disciplines and, on the other, the study of Hindutva as a field that is of interest almost exclusively to scholars in South Asian studies. It provides an analytical contribution towards the conceptualization of right-wing extremism as a global phenomenon.

KEYWORDS Bharatiya Janata Party, Hindu, Hindutva, India, Muslim, nationalism, Rashtriya Swayamsevak, right-wing extremism, Sangh, violence

> The mission of reorganizing the Hindu society on the lines of its unique national genius which the Sangh has taken up is not only a great process of true national regeneration of Bharat but also the inevitable precondition to realize the dream of world unity and human welfare. Our one supreme goal is to bring to life the all-round glory and greatness of our Hindu Rashtra.
>
> Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 'Mission'[1]

> The only positive thing about the Hindu right wing is that they dominate the streets. They do not tolerate the current injustice and often riot and attack Muslims when things get out of control, usually after the Muslims disrespect and degrade Hinduism too much … India will continue to wither and die unless the Indian nationalists

1   Quoted in Thomas A. Howard, 'Hindu nationalism against religious pluralism—or, the sacralization of religious identity and its discontents in present-day India', in Kaye V. Cook (ed.), *Faith in a Pluralist Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2018), 62–78 (67).

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> consolidate properly and strike to win. It is essential that the European and Indian resistance movements learn from each other and cooperate as much as possible. Our goals are more or less identical.
>
> Anders Behring Breivik, '2083: A European Declaration of Independence'[2]

There is currently a right-wing extremist party governing the world's largest democracy, yet it is remarkably absent in the literature on right-wing extremism. To address this theoretical and empirical Eurocentrism, this article presents the first in-depth analysis of Hindutva using the terminology of right-wing extremism. Hindutva refers to the project of achieving a Hindu *rashtra*, or state, in India. Although Hindu nationalism or Hindu extremism may be used interchangeably to designate this sociopolitical phenomenon, this article posits 'Hindutva' as an ideology that encompasses a wide range of forms, from violent, paramilitary fringe groups, to organizations that advocate the restoration of Hindu 'culture', to mainstream political parties. By redefining Hindutva in this manner, we can create a framework for right-wing extremism with universal dimensions.

This article begins with the transnational interactions between South Asian and European intellectual spheres as Hindutva emerged in relation to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. In pre-independence India, Hindutva sought to incorporate elements from European models into its own *modus operandi*. At the same time, intellectuals in Europe engaged with Hindutva ideologues. Since India's independence in 1947, Hindutva has been instrumental in nation-building and the construction of a majoritarian identity in India. Hindutva actors view violence as a legitimate means of achieving ethnonational territorial claims, and the state has, at times, resorted to violent means. Yet, Hindutva only truly succeeded as a mainstream phenomenon in 2014 with the election of the current Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi. By marking Hindus as 'insiders' and other religious groups, notably Muslims, as 'outsiders', Modi's government has constructed Hindutva as synonymous with Indian nationalism.

With the analysis of xenophobia and prejudice being generally limited to western examples, it leaves many other, diverse manifestations unscrutinized. This article shows right-wing extremism operating in a non-western, multicultural society in order to shed light on the paradigmatic resemblances between various exclusionary nationalisms.

Right-wing extremism beyond the West

Right-wing extremism in Europe emerges from philosophical exchanges in the nineteenth century that gave rise to the development and spread of fascist

2   Andrew Berwick [*pseud.*, i.e. Anders Behring Breivik], '2083: A European declaration of independence', 1475, available on the *Public Intelligence* website at https://info.publicintelligence.net/AndersBehringBreivikManifesto.pdf (viewed 28 May 2020).

thinking. This is best exemplified by the philosopher Jakob Fries who argued: 'When a nation is ruled by a common spirit, then from below, out of the people, will come life sufficient for the discharge of all public business.'[3] Fries was involved with the *Burschenschaften*, German student organizations that called for antisemitic actions in the name of German nationalism, and that have been described as early formations of right-wing extremists: 'the anti-rationalism, xenophobia, anti-semitism, intolerance and terrorism of the *Burschenschaften* present the same syndrome which, under different circumstances, the Nazis were to institutionalize.'[4]

These ideological developments became mainstream when European fascism —having drawn on available radical and populist approaches, and been heavily influenced by the anarchist and socialist movements of the early twentieth century—came to fruition shortly before the Second World War. Fascism has been defined as 'a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism'.[5] Populist ultra-nationalism refers to a conception of the nation as a 'racial, historical, spiritual or organic reality' with a distinct community of members who belong.[6] Since 1945, fascism has split into several factions in response to various political circumstances.[7] Scholars have thus shifted their attention to the various extreme-right movements, organizations and parties that developed across Europe in the decades following the Second World War. The rise of extreme-right organizations and paramilitary/vigilante groups, as well as political parties, is well documented.[8] Influential academic scholarship on contemporary right-wing

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3   Jakob Fries, quoted in G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. from the German by S. W. Dyde (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications 2012), xv.

4   Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1972), 119.

5   Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge 1991), 26.

6   Ibid., 37.

7   Roger Eatwell, 'Introduction: the new extreme right challenge', in Roger Eatwell and Cas Mudde (eds), *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right Challenge* (London and New York: Routledge 2004), 1–16.

8   Sabine von Mering and Timothy Wyman McCarty (eds), *Right-Wing Radicalism Today: Perspectives from Europe and the US* (London and New York: Routledge 2013); Uwe Backes and Patrick Moreau (eds), *The Extreme Right in Europe: Current Trends and Perspectives* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2012); David Art, *Inside the Radical Right: The Development of Anti-Immigrant Parties in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011); Antonis A. Ellinas, *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010); Paul Hainsworth, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe* (London and New York: Routledge 2008); Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer (eds), *Extreme Right Activists in Europe: Through the Magnifying Glass* (London and New York: Routledge 2006); Elisabeth Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2005); Peter Davies and Derek Lynch (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (London and New York: Routledge 2002); Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2000); Peter H. Merkl and

extremism as a field of study is thus primarily confined to a geographical focus on Europe and North America, building on the ideological and organizational frameworks in earlier studies of fascism and Nazism.

Despite the plethora of comparative literature on right-wing extremism in the western context, very little research has been conducted outside this terrain. The exceptions are case studies of Turkey,[9] South Africa,[10] Israel,[11] Japan,[12] and Indonesia,[13] which often adopt the typology used to characterize right-wing extremism in the West as a springboard for comparison.[14] This article employs a similar approach in the case of India, hoping to broaden the field of right-wing extremism as a global phenomenon.

When it comes to India, scholars of right-wing extremism in the West have misrepresented Hindutva as a type of nationalism that is primarily religious rather than ethnonationalist. The influential fascism scholar Robert Paxton, for instance, notes: 'For Hindu fundamentalists, their religion is the focus of an intense attachment that the secular and pluralist Indian state does not succeed in offering. In such communities, a religious-based fascism is conceivable.'[15] Thus, while Paxton does acknowledge that 'no two fascisms need be alike in their symbols and rhetoric, employing, as they do, the local patriotic repertory',[16] the notion that religious identity takes precedence over national

Leonard Weinberg (eds), *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass 1997).

9   Stéphane de Tapia, 'Turkish extreme right-wing movements—between Turkism, Islamism, Eurasism, and pan-Turkism', in Backes and Moreau (eds), *The Extreme Right in Europe*, 297–320.

10   Adrian Guelke, 'The quiet dog: the extreme right and the South African transition', in Merkl and Weinberg (eds), *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties*, 254–70.

11   Arie Perliger and Ami Pedahzur, 'The radical right in Israel', in Jens Rydgren (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 667–80; Shai Bermanis, Daphna Canetti-Nisim and Ami Pedahzur, 'Religious fundamentalism and the extreme right-wing camp in Israel', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2004, 159–76; Ami Pedahzur, 'The transformation of Israel's extreme right', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2001, 25–42; Raphael Cohen-Almagor, 'Combating right-wing political extremism in Israel: critical appraisal', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 9, no. 4, 1997, 82–105; Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991).

12   Naoto Higuchi, 'The radical right in Japan', in Rydgren (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, 681–97; Alan Tansman (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2009); Alan Tansman (ed.), *The Culture of Japanese Fascism* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press 2009); George Macklin Wilson, 'A new look at the problem of "Japanese fascism"', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1968, 401–12.

13   Yannick Lengkeek, 'Staged glory: the impact of fascism on "cooperative" nationalist circles in late colonial Indonesia, 1935–1942', *Fascism*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2018, 109–31.

14   See Stein Ugelvik Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe: The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs 2001).

15   Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Penguin 2005), 204.

16   Ibid.

identity is flawed when considering the evolution of Hindutva as an ideology seeking to create an ethnonationalist state.

Paxton's analysis indicates the need for critique in the way that religion is conceptualized among western scholars, and especially those who focus on right-wing extremism. Paxton, largely due to the lack of scholarly exchange between western and South Asian theorists, displays a fundamental misreading of secularism based on a common Eurocentric understanding of the term. Secularism on the Indian subcontinent does not denote a separation of church and state as has been conceived in the West. A contentious issue in scholarship about Hinduism is the argument that the idea of Hinduism as a world religion was created by colonial scholarship rather than being an indigenous category. Over the past few decades, a number of influential scholars of religion have claimed that it is a mistake to see Hinduism as a world religion on a par with Christianity; the tendency to make this false parallel, they argue, originated in theological arguments from within the Christian tradition as well from the need of the colonial power to map and control its Asian subjects.[17] However, Indian intellectuals and leaders participated actively in a dialogue about the nature of religion in general and of Hinduism in particular during the colonial era;[18] this laid the foundation for Hindu leaders to reinvent Hinduism as a modern, universal and missionary religion.[19] Given the cultural complexity of South Asia and the long history of interaction between Hinduism and western political concepts and traditions, there is no reason to expect Indian concepts and practices of secularism to look familiar to a western observer.

Consequently, the Indian brand of secularism embraces the practice of religion in a state that affords religious plurality. India embodies a 'contextual secularism' in which the relationship between religion and state can be characterized not by 'a strict wall of separation' but a 'principled distance'.[20] Or, to put it succinctly, 'even when a State is tolerant of religions, it need not lead to religious tolerance in a society'.[21] In this sense, India has never experienced a

17 Torkel Brekke, *Makers of Modern Indian Religions in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002); Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ and Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press 1996); Timothy Fitzgerald, 'Hinduism and the "world religion" fallacy', *Religion*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1990, 101–18; Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell 1990); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'the Mythic East'* (London and New York: Routledge 1999).

18 Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005).

19 Torkel Brekke, 'The conceptual foundation of missionary Hinduism', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1999, 203–14.

20 Rajeev Bhargava, 'The distinctiveness of Indian secularism', in Aakash Singh and Silika Mohapatra (eds), *Indian Political Thought: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge 2010), 99–119.

21 Ashis Nandy, 'An anti-secularist manifesto', *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1995, 35–64 (36).

western form of secularism; its post-independence political landscape has witnessed continuous expressions of religiosity that are understood to be inherently egalitarian. Indeed, the problematic implementation of western concepts is precisely what Werner Menski means when he describes the 'serious methodological error … to take everything "Hindu" or "Muslim" as religious, although it is a fact that since ancient times religious and cultural traditions have known the coexistence and connectedness of the religious and the secular.'[22] Thus, the reaction of 'Hindu fundamentalists' (in Paxton's terminology) to the state as a 'secular' institution challenges religious coexistence rather than the practice of religion per se.

Furthermore, and on a related note, Paxton displays a misunderstanding of religion as 'an intense attachment' for 'Hindu fundamentalists'. As will be discussed throughout this article, Hindutva is not centred on religion (although Hinduism does play a significant role), but rather on how religion is *politicized* in such a way that being a Hindu generates belonging as an ethnonationalist identity. Indeed, the founder of Hindutva, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, stressed that religion was not even the most important element of Hindu identity; in his view, influenced by western theories of nationalism, identity was a combination of sacred territory, race and language.[23] Furthermore, we can interpret fundamentalism as a structure of authority in which lay people take on new religious roles in a power vacuum opened by modernity, rather than as a particular obsession with religiosity.[24] In this sense, fundamentalism can have local expressions based on contextual nuances, including, for example, Hindu, Islamic, Christian and Buddhist fundamentalisms, yet fundamentalism encompasses a universal appeal that lends itself to adoption in various exclusionary movements.

It is similarly important to clarify that, thus far, scholarship on Hindutva has largely been confined to the field of South Asian studies. This is due to the fact that Hindutva is viewed as unique to the subcontinent. Consequently, most scholars of Hindutva describe it as religious or as majoritarian nationalism (with the implication that it is a singular case) before detailing the intricacies of South Asian communal politics. Although such scholars do acknowledge the complexity of Hindutva as an ideology that deploys both cultural and ethnonational sentiments to develop its political agenda, their interventions are not situated within the broader scope of right-wing extremism as a global occurrence.

This article challenges the notion that Hindutva is an isolated ideological phenomenon. It does not disregard the circumstantial origin, evolution and adaptation of Hindutva, but it illustrates this development in relation to

22 Werner Menski, 'Assessing communal conflicts and Hindu fascism in India', *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, vol. 8, 2009, 313–35 (313).
23 Christophe Jaffrelot, 'Introduction: The invention of an ethnic nationalism', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2007), 3–25 (15).
24 Torkel Brekke, *Fundamentalism: Prophecy and Protest in an Age of Globalization* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012).

global ideological engagements, especially its early links with Italian Fascism and German Nazism. Despite the lack of any continuing relationships with European contemporaries following the Second World War and India's independence, this article argues that Hindutva in India parallels right-wing extremism in the West. While India's 'pluralism and diversity is [*sic*] not a postmodern phenomenon, it [*sic*] has ancient roots in the most distant layers of Indian cultures',[25] contemporary Hindutva actors express Muslim Otherness in a vocabulary similar to European right-wing extremists.

The following section details the historical evolution of Hindutva in relation to broader geopolitical dynamics. It demonstrates how its ideology and organization developed *vis-à-vis* European contemporaries such that these engagements were mutually significant at a fundamental level. Hindutva offers insights into alternative expressions of ethnonationalism, authoritarianism and chauvinism that can offer new perspectives on right-wing extremism as a global phenomenon.

Common origins

The intellectual journey of Hindutva began in the nineteenth century, emerging as an anti-colonial resistance movement against the British in India. Early ideologues—influenced by European scholars—claimed that Indian civilization was superior in its language (being the mother of Indo-European tongues) and its race (having Aryan origins).[26] In 1909, the British set up a system of separate electorates in which Hindus and Muslims could only vote for Hindu and Muslim candidates, respectively, in local elections. This divide-and-rule strategy helped to construct a polarized environment in which religiously framed identity politics would flourish throughout the century. Local Hindu elites across the country formed Hindu *sabhas* (associations) that culminated in the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1914, which encouraged anti-British and anti-Muslim sentiment.[27] The idea of 'Hindu consciousness' was disseminated in printed materials that promoted a sense of national belonging based on Hindu symbols and practices.[28] Hindu identity was presented in sharp contrast to the spectre of the Muslim as a 'foreigner' and an 'invader', the internal enemy, who was complicit in the colonial project of the British, the external enemy.

From the movement's beginning, Hindutva ideologues sought connections with Fascist Italy. During the 1920s, Mussolini's regime had considerable

25   Menski, 'Assessing communal conflicts and Hindu fascism in India', 318.
26   Jaffrelot, 'Introduction', in Jaffrelot (ed.), *Hindu Nationalism*; Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origin, Ideology, and Modern Myths* (Oxford and New York: Berg 2001).
27   Jaffrelot, 'Introduction', in Jaffrelot (ed.), *Hindu Nationalism*.
28   Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*.

influence on them as regional newspapers in India spread news of the transformation of Italian society. The appeal of militarization in order to create order in society was seen as an attractive alternative to democracy, which was viewed as being too closely connected to British values.

Such ideas evolved through the growth of grassroots social movements, particularly the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Patriotic Organization), established in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. Its founding ideological text by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, first published in 1923, defines the nation according to categorically ethnic Hindu-ness and territorial belonging. Here, Savarkar 'assimilates territorial-cultural determinants into a concept of nationalism that stresses the ethnic and racial substance of the Hindu nation'.[29] Consequently, Hindus were united by 'a common heritage' that was bequeathed by a 'great civilization —our Hindu culture'.[30]

In 1931, Hedgewar's mentor, Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, toured Europe and met with Mussolini during a long visit to Italy. Moonje observed how young Italian boys were recruited to attend weekly meetings that included participating in physical exercises and paramilitary drills, influencing what would later become the RSS's *modus operandi*. On his return to India, Moonje remarked how Hindus should emulate their Italian counterparts.[31] To this day, the RSS runs *shakhas*, or cells, that volunteers join or are recruited into by their local chapters. Each *shakha* teaches physical drill exercises as well as education courses on (selective) ancient Hindu texts. Volunteers are indoctrinated into the Hindutva mission and are assigned responsibilities, such as assisting in social support services for the poor and needy who are the most vulnerable to Hindutva dogma.

By the end of the 1930s, Italian officials in India, such as the consulate in Bombay, established connections with Hindutva actors, including the recruitment of Indian students to learn Italian and imbibe Fascist propaganda.[32] These transnational ideological and organizational links continued during the rise of Nazism in Germany. The Hindu Mahasabha openly supported the Third Reich, promoting an Aryan connection between Nazism and Hindutva.[33] Savarkar, then president of the Hindu Mahasabha and close affiliate of the RSS, made continuous reference in writings and speeches to Germany's treatment of the Jewish population as a model for India's

29   Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York and London: New York University Press 1998), 50.
30   Veer Savarkar, quoted in Vinay Lal, 'Veer Savarkar: ideologue of Hindutva', available on the *UCLA Manas* website at www.southasia.ucla.edu/history-politics/hindu-rashtra/veer-savarkar-ideologue-hindutva (viewed 29 May 2020).
31   Casolari, 'Hindutva's foreign tie-up in the 1930s', 220.
32   Ibid., 222.
33   Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, 66; Eugene J. D'souza, 'Nazi propaganda in India', *Social Scientist*, vol. 28, no. 5/6, 2000, 77–90 (88).

Muslim 'problem'.[34] In response, the NSDAP (Nazi Party) paper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, featured Savarkar's approval of German occupation.[35]

RSS leader Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar adopted a more extreme position, arguing that 'being a Hindu was a matter of race and blood, not only a matter of culture. In turn that was an idea which was strikingly similar to the racial myths elaborated in Germany, more than in Italy.'[36] Golwalkar's *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (1939) reflects this view:

> The foreign races in Hindusthan [India] must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any pre-ferential treatment—not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt.[37]

Inspired by Hitler's actions in Austria and the annexation of the Sudeten-land as embodying 'the true Nation concept', Golwalkar promoted race as being fundamental to the Hindu nation.[38] The vision of disciplined national-ism under a superior leader, whereby the nation is a collective unity, led to National Socialism being an attractive model for Hindutva ideologues who rejected British individualism.[39] Such racist attitudes led Golwalkar to with-draw his book from circulation in 1948, given the negative attention it had received—it was one of the most frequently quoted Hindutva texts—and the negative effect it had had on the RSS's reputation.

In Hindutva, representations of 'the people' are thus central to the relationship between belonging and the imagined community. Described as 'pure' and 'authentic', the idea of the *Volk*, with its Germanic origins, can be embraced in Hindutva, as can a focus on the Aryan past. Inspired by the emergence of race science as a field of enquiry in the colonial academy, as well as Orientalist philosophy, Aryanism developed as a 'racial theory of Indian civilization' based on primordialist and evolutionary conceptions of

34 Casolari, 'Hindutva's foreign tie-up in the 1930's', 224; D'souza, 'Nazi propaganda in India', 89.
35 Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, 59.
36 Casolari, 'Hindutva's foreign tie-up in the 1930's', 223–4.
37 Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat 1939), 62, quoted in Sangeeta Kamat and Biju Mathew, 'Mapping political violence in a global-ized world: the case of Hindu nationalism', *Social Justice*, vol. 30, no. 3/93, 2000, 4–16 (9).
38 Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, quoted in Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, 60.
39 Benjamin Zachariah, 'A voluntary *Gleichschaltung*? Perspectives from India towards a non-Eurocentric understanding of fascism', *Journal of Transcultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2014, 63–100 (82–3).

nationalism.[40] This did not result simply in a direct application of European nationalist thought, but in a process of sustained and complex intellectual engagement between colonial India and Europe.[41] Indeed, 'the Third Reich embraced a range of pagan, esoteric, and Indo-Aryan religious doctrines that buttressed its racial, political, and ideological goals'; these included a 'belief in the ethno-religious connections between the lost Ario-Germanic civilization of the Thule (Atlantis) and an Indo-Aryan civilization centred in northern India'.[42] Hindutva as a result maintains a continuing interest in connecting notions of *Arya dharm*, or the 'Hindu race', to European conceptualizations of the 'Aryan race' as a source of legitimation.[43] Its guiding premise advocates a civilizational superiority based on racial characteristics.

By extension, being a Hindu literally equates to *Blut und Boden*: 'a "natural" geography and sacred ties of blood'.[44] Hindutva depends on a territorial nation-state and the criterion for belonging is an ethnoreligious identity. Nostalgia for a mythic Vedic 'golden age' is a current running throughout the Hindutva narrative. By idolizing a golden past that existed prior to the Mughal Empire and the British Raj, Hindutva attempts to write a historiographical account that contradicts the 'shame' of foreign invasion. The grievances of the 'oppressed' stir up a wish for the restoration of the Hindu *rashtra*. Just as we might conceptualize the *Reich* as the site of authority and sovereignty emanating from the people, *rashtra* in Hindutva similarly connotes a sacred nation emerging from indigenous Hindu claims to a bounded geography.

Like the Italians, the German authorities engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship with Hindutva actors. Nazi agents translated *Mein Kampf* into Indian languages, conducted covert intelligence operations and radio broadcasts, and distributed pro-Nazi propaganda materials to sympathetic press agencies in India.[45] Hindutva writings circulated in German newspapers in exchange for articles favouring Germany's 'Jewish policy' in regional Indian newspapers.[46] Nazi propagandists and German businesses generously funded these newspapers, while others were owned by organizations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha, that openly advocated National Socialism for India and a 'Hindu Fuehrer'.[47]

40   Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press 1997), xxiv.
41   Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 3.
42   Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press 2017), 163, 184. See also Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander and Douglas T. McGetchin (eds), *Transnational Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London and New York: Routledge 2014).
43   Benjamin Zachariah, 'At the fuzzy edges of fascism: framing the *Volk* in India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2015, 639–55 (648).
44   Ibid., 653.
45   D'souza, 'Nazi propaganda in India', 78–9.
46   Casolari, 'Hindutva's foreign tie-up in the 1930s', 225.
47   D'souza, 'Nazi propaganda in India', 81–2.

At the institutional level, the Indisches Ausschuss (India Institute) was founded in Munich in 1928, under its parent organization, the Deutsche Akademie (German Academy). Between 1929 and 1938, the Indisches Ausschuss awarded scholarships to Indian students and funded *lektors* to teach German to students hoping to travel to Germany. The institute was incorporated into the NSDAP Auslands-Organisation and established Nazi cells in Calcutta that were active in promoting Nazi propaganda during the Third Reich.[48] Simultaneously, Indian exiles in Europe conspired with the German government by reporting to informants in India by means of private correspondence as well as in newspaper articles.[49]

Although Italian Fascists attracted more recruits in India, Indo-German connections formed between Indian intellectuals and Nazi ideologues. Benoy Kumar Sarkar was one such figure who became a spokesman for a range of right-wing networks composed of scholars, ideologues and political activists, and who was an enthusiast of both Fascism and Nazism.[50] Intellectual and educator Taraknath Das also engaged in various ideological affiliations, including National Socialism for a brief period (although he favoured Italian Fascist policies as a model for India until the Second World War).[51] Finally, Subhas Chandra Bose, a freedom fighter in India's independence movement, sought alliances with Nazi Germany,[52] Italy and Japan during the war; he fled to Berlin in 1941 and founded the Indische Legion.[53]

It is also worth describing in some detail the figure of Savitri Devi, who cultivated a Nazi-Aryan ideology during her time in India. Born Maximiani Portas in 1905, the French writer identified with her Greek ancestry early in life, idealizing its ancient civilization and Hellenism. Portas continued her intellectual journey towards Aryan racial philosophy in India, seeking 'truth' in the Hindu 'homeland' and adopting the name Savitri Devi. During the late 1930s, Devi encountered Hindutva individuals and groups, including Moonje, Hedgewar's RSS and Savarkar's Hindu Mahasabha, which greatly influencedr development of the Aryan myth.[54] Devi echoed Hindutva ideologues in the need to foster a Hindu consciousness in the wake of Muslim ascendancy and Hindu disadvantage. As such, she promoted Hindutva in

48 Zachariah, 'At the fuzzy edges of fascism', 647.
49 Zachariah, 'A voluntary *Gleichschaltung*?', 78.
50 Zachariah, 'At the fuzzy edges of fascism', 646.
51 Maria Framke, 'Shopping ideologies for independent India? Taraknath Das's engagement with Italian Fascism and German National Socialism', *Itinerario,* vol. 40, no. 1, 2016, 55–81.
52 Romain Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany: Politics, Intelligence and Propaganda 1941–43* (London: Hurst & Company 2011).
53 Bose had long held left-wing beliefs, having been involved in the radical politics of the Indian National Congress during his youth. He sought out Axis allies with the primary aim of overthrowing British rule on the subcontinent. Thus Bose's residence in Germany was fraught with strategic differences of opinion with the authorities.
54 Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, 45.

order to create 'a sense of shared history, culture, and an awareness of India as one's Holy Land'.[55] In *A Warning to the Hindus* (1939), Devi stressed the achievement of 'Hindudom' through a cultivated, unified nationalism rooted in Aryan civilization. Military resistance and self-defence, she argued, should be employed against the threat of 'Mohammedanization'.[56] In 1938, Devi met Asit Krishna Mukherji, editor of *The New Mercury*, a National Socialist magazine supported by the German consulate in Calcutta. The two married and carried out espionage on US and British officials for the Axis powers during the war.[57] Following the war, Hindutva did not feature in Devi's life. However, her writings, such as *The Lightning and the Sun* (1958), which claimed that Hitler was a reincarnation of the god Vishnu, have continued to inspire neo-Nazi supporters and circles.[58]

Thus, European and South Asian political spheres were intertwined, so that 'the directionality of narratives of travel and absorption of fascist ideas … [was] not from Europe to elsewhere, but multilinear and multilaterally invented.'[59] Fascism and Nazism were not European products available for export but continuous cycles of ideological and, at times, mobilized engagement.[60] Hindutva ideologues often incorporated elements of Italian and German models that were attractive but, to some extent, already present in India.[61] At the same time, intellectuals in Europe engaged with Hindutva to further their ideological development.

Post-colonial Hindutva

The withdrawal of the British in 1947 marked the partition of the subcontinent into modern-day India and Pakistan (and later Bangladesh), a Hindu-majority nation and a Muslim-majority nation, respectively. Although the RSS avoided taking part in the independence movement struggle in the previous years—probably for fear of being banned by the British—activists played a major role in the ensuing Hindu-Muslim communal riots during the partition. While Hindu-Muslim communal violence is evident throughout India's

55   Ibid., 51.
56   Savitri Devi, *A Warning to the Hindus* (Calcutta 1939), available online at www. mourningtheancient.com/hindus.pdf (viewed 29 May 2020).
57   Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, 67–74.
58   An online archive collection of her writings is managed by Dr R. G. Fowler, a pseudonym for white nationalist and *Counter-Currents* editor Greg Johnson.
59   Zachariah, 'At the fuzzy edges of fascism', 641.
60   Similarly, we should look to broader global engagements with various ideologies of mobilization. The emergence of 'cosmopolitan thought zones' in colonial South Asia, for instance, looked to consolidate transnational intellectual configurations of anti-colonial resistance beyond the mimicry of western revolutionary concepts. For more, see Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra (eds), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010).
61   Zachariah, 'A voluntary *Gleichschaltung*?', 89–91.

history, it was central to the founding of the Indian nation-state, which witnessed its greatest levels of violence prior to, during and immediately following the partition. Hence:

> What appears as Hindu fascism or fundamentalism to outsiders may have many other dimensions than simply religious traditionalism and deadly desires to exterminate the religious 'other'. It is certainly partly concerned with the protection of an imagined and actual motherland against neighbouring others that claimed their territory in the horrible struggles of 1947, a troubled memory that haunts India and Pakistan.[62]

Hindutva's aim to restore *Akhand Bharat* (Undivided India) includes the recovery of lost territory from the past. Following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 by former RSS member Nathuram Godse, who detested Gandhi for his call for 'Hindu-Muslim unity' and for ceding territory that became Pakistan, the RSS was temporarily proscribed as an organization. Hindutva actors have justified Godse's act of violence as an expression of ethnonational hopes. The European extreme right has left behind a deep legacy of violence; in Italy, for example, 'the street violence that accompanied Fascism's rise to power served to reinforce the idea that it was about action, not words'.[63] Right-wing extremist movements have resorted to violent behaviour as an acceptable means of expressing a radical ideological message and realizing their vision of society. 'Saffron terror', the term used to designate the violence in India committed by Hindutva actors,[64] on the other hand, enacts a majoritarian nationalism that is inseparable from organized violence when public space is designated as Hindu space, both physically and in the national imagination.[65] Thus, while European right-wing extremism is arguably confined to a fringe phenomenon, Hindutva has been visible in nation-building and majoritarian identity in India.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a widespread growth in political activities as the RSS expanded its position as a parent organization that spawned the Sangh Parivar, or family of organizations in the Hindutva fold.[66] There are numerous affiliates of the Sangh, ranging from extreme and violent paramilitary groups, including youth wings (such as Bajrang Dal), to 'cultural'

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62 Menski, 'Assessing communal conflicts and Hindu fascism in India', 316.
63 Davies and Lynch (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right*, 106.
64 Guy Elecheroth and Stephen Reicher, *Identity, Violence and Power: Mobilising Hatred, Demobilising Dissent* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017).
65 Dibyesh Anand, 'The violence of security: Hindu nationalism and the politics of representing "the Muslim" as a danger', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 379, 2005, 203–15; Rupal Oza, 'The geography of Hindu right-wing violence in India', in Derek Gregory and Allan Pred (eds), *Violent Geographies: Fear, Terror, and Political Violence* (London and New York: Routledge 2007), 153–73.
66 Suhas Palshikar, 'The BJP and Hindu nationalism: centrist politics and majoritarian impulses', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2015, 719–35 (729); Oza, 'The geography of Hindu right-wing violence in India', 159–60.

organizations (such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad), charity-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (such as Sewa Bharati), trade unions (such as Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh), farmers' unions (such as Bharatiya Kisan Sangh) and student organizations (such as Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad). Female-only organizations (such as Rashtriya Sevika Samiti and Sadhvi Shakti Parishad) represent women as heroic mothers and wives/daughters of the nation. These affiliate organizations share the vision of Hindutva ideology, often creating local alliances and volunteer networks.

In the 1980s and 1990s, in an attempt to recruit mass support, the Sangh organized campaigns that disseminated merchandise featuring Hindu symbols, such as stickers and calendars, which were widely popular and visibly linked Hindu images with Hindutva.[67] The 1990s also witnessed Hindutva actors seeking formal political power in the electoral arena.[68] It is during this time that Hindutva first came to mainstream prominence as a movement that sought to institutionalize Hindi as the official language of government and push for the revival of Sanskrit.[69] Similarly, popular cultural productions, particularly films,[70] represented Muslims as an enemy of Hindu majoritarian identity, instilling into public consciousness the relevance of Hindutva tropes and narratives.[71] The rise in lower-middle-class support for Hindutva in the 1990s helped to cultivate a space for Hindutva actors to tap into this sentiment decades later.[72] Thus, in the 1990s, Hindutva slowly became mainstream, irrespective of the party in central government.

Throughout, the RSS consistently remains at the centre of the Hindutva family as its ideological nucleus.[73] Although officially non-political, it operates through a complex web of networks, each reproducing and sustaining Hindutva in two important ways: first, through an 'elaborate institutional edifice' in civil society; and, second, by operating a 'dual identity', either with a highly visible, political profile or through voluntary, grassroots services.[74] By embedding the concept of Hindutva across different sectors of society, the RSS uses its supervising influence in order to conflate the cultural, religious and political aspects of Hindu identity.[75]

67   Oza, 'The geography of Hindu right-wing violence in India', 160.
68   Palshikar, 'The BJP and Hindu nationalism', 730.
69   Manisha Basu, *The Rhetoric of Hindu India: Language and Urban Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016), 12.
70   Sanjeev Kumar HM, 'Constructing the nation's enemy: *Hindutva*, popular culture and the Muslim "other" in Bollywood cinema', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2013, 458–69.
71   Madhavi Murthy, 'Representing *Hindutva*: nation, religion and masculinity in Indian popular cinema, 1990 to 2003', *Popular Communication*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2009, 267–81.
72   Palshikar, 'The BJP and Hindu nationalism', 730–1.
73   Chetan Bhatt and Parita Mukta, 'Hindutva in the West: mapping the antinomies of diaspora nationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2000, 407–41 (414).
74   Kamat and Mathew, 'Mapping political violence in a globalized world', 11.
75   Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001).

Compared to European right-wing extremism, Hindutva in India proliferates its vision on a grander scale. Key to its success is the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party, a manifestation of how Hindutva operates in party politics. Although Sangh affiliates are a broad spectrum of grassroots movements, the BJP is the only organization that contests elections as a political party. Since its founding, the BJP first enjoyed success at the ballot box in local elections. In 2014, however, the party secured its largest electoral victory in India's political history with a majority coalition in the national parliament. The following details the evolution of the BJP and how it truly 'mainstreamed' Hindutva under Narendra Modi.

Mainstreaming Hindutva

An affiliate of the Sangh, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS, Indian People's Party) was founded shortly after independence in 1951 to counter the centre-left secularist Indian National Congress. The BJS rejected universalism as promoted by Gandhian ideals of pluralism and diversity, and advocated ethnic nationalism instead. From the late 1960s, the BJS campaigned on a xenophobic platform, calling for minorities to 'Indianize' and assimilate into a purportedly 'Hindian' nation. However, it had to compromise in order to survive elections either by adopting a moderate stance as a patriotic, populist party, or by appealing to a militant sense of aggressive Hindutva. The BJS faced an 'adaptation dilemma': accordingly, 'to become accepted by the mainstream, and prevent repression by the state, [extreme-right parties] need to moderate, but to satisfy their hard-core members, and to keep a clear profile, they need to stay extreme'.[76] This eventually led to the relaunch of the party as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) in 1980, favouring the former, more moderate approach, but continuing to assert that India is a Hindu nation. The BJP today affirms 'Hindu identity and culture [as] being the mainstay of the Indian nation and of Indian society'.[77]

Yet, the 'adaptation dilemma' has remained a key tension within BJP operations. In 2002, a significant event drew international attention to India, namely the Gujarat riots, in which Hindu-Muslim violence lasting several weeks resulted in thousands of (overwhelmingly Muslim) deaths in the state. International agencies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented atrocious human rights violations, including rape and torture. These reports describe the violence as a pogrom and demonstrate the complicity of state officials, including then BJP Chief Minister Narendra

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76   Cas Mudde, 'Conclusion: defending democracy and the extreme right', in Eatwell and Mudde (eds), *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right*, 193–212 (193).

77   Bharatiya Janata Party, 'BJP history', available via the *WayBackMachine* at https://web.archive.org/web/20190214065025/http://www.bjp.org/about-the-party (last viewed live 14 February 2019).

Modi, who worked alongside Sangh affiliates to orchestrate and plan attacks well in advance. By framing Muslims as a threat to the Hindu collective, 'the maintenance of communal tensions … is essential for the maintenance of militant Hindu nationalism, but also has uses for other political parties, organizations, and even the state and central governments'.[78] State-sponsored violence during the riots assisted in the construction of Hindutva majoritarian nationalism. Investigations by the Indian government have pardoned state officials despite evidence of complicity. Narendra Modi—a leading RSS activist in his youth—was subsequently banned from entering the United Kingdom, the United States and several European countries for his administration's involvement in the riots.

Except for participating in the coalition national government of 1998–2004, the BJP only succeeded in local and state elections in post-independence India. In 2014, it once again entered government, this time securing a stunning outright majority. Its key ingredient for victory was the former Chief Minister of Gujarat. Throughout the election campaign, Modi exploited a populist narrative to secure mass support across Indian society. Positioning himself as an outsider with humble origins and a magnetic personality, Modi's tactic of attacking the political and media establishment was a strategy to 'present himself as an *aam admi*, a common man',[79] often the '"victim" of an elite "news media conspiracy"'.[80] He constructed an image as the voice of the people, as the authentic India. Modi's spectacular example of a 'populist zeitgeist' accused the incumbent Indian National Congress for decades of dynastic politics, promising a new democratic future of transparency, accountability and accessibility.[81]

At the same time, the BJP constructed a 'civic zeitgeist' by mobilizing along recurring themes of a Muslim 'threat' to the Hindu majority, creating a narrative to further Hindu insecurity.[82] In Hinduism, the goddess Durga combats evils threatening the sanctity of good. Within Hindutva, Durga is personified as the nation in the form of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India). Islam is framed as a harbinger of evil to the Hindu nation. Muslim men are viewed as instinctively fanatic terrorists rooted in Islam as a violent religion.[83] There is likewise an

78 Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 2003), 9.

79 Christophe Jaffrelot, 'The Modi-centric BJP 2014 election campaign: new techniques and old tactics', *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2015, 151–66 (159).

80 Paula Chakravartty and Srirupa Roy, 'Mr Modi goes to Delhi: mediated populism and the 2014 Indian elections', *Television and New Media*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2015, 311–22 (316).

81 See Cas Mudde, 'The populist zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2004, 541–63.

82 Daphne Halikiopoulou, Steven Mock and Sofia Vasilopoulo, 'The civic zeitgeist: nationalism and liberal values in the European radical right', *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2012, 107–27.

83 Rajagopal, *Politics after Television*; Anuj Nadadur, 'The "Muslim threat" and the Bharatiya Janata Party's rise to power', *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, vol. 2, no. 1/2, 2006, 88–110.

attempt to frame Muslim masculinity through hypersexualized and barbaric tropes (reinforcing Orientalist portrayals), especially against 'vulnerable' Hindu women. Claims of 'love jihad' (a familiar refrain among right-wing extremists in the West), whereby Muslim men falsely declare their love to Hindu women in order to convert them to Islam, is a constant anxiety.[84] The Hindu woman symbolizes daughters of *Bharat Mata* and consequently, an attack on a Hindu woman is an attack on the nation itself. Muslim men, according to this logic, are designated as instinctively anti-national. On the other hand, Hindutva promotes an image of Hindu masculinity as assertive, protective and patriarchal. Hindu deities, such as Rre transformed from pensive and peaceful figures to chauvinistic warriors. Such 'masculine Hinduism' stems from a reaction to the effeminate representation of Hindu men during the colonial era.[85] Hindutva's vision of men as proud warrior-like figures is embedded in a narrative of survival.

The BJP not only projects Muslims as an internal enemy but as an external enemy as well. It openly stokes fear of the 'illegal' migration of labourers from Muslim-majority Bangladesh—as encouraged by the Congress Party—to advance its agenda. Such rhetoric is far from unusual for right-wing extremist parties in the West that have combined anti-establishment populism with a deeply rooted ethnonationalist xenophobia.[86] The structural transformations in Europe that emerged from globalization following the Second World War have been cathartic in furthering right-wing extremism; changes in cultural, linguistic, economic and political spheres have resulted in a condition of insecurity and instability in a world of rampant change. By highlighting the loss of industries, employment, cultural lifestyle and political representation, European right-wing extremist parties respond to a perceived disappearing ethnonational identity. This manifests as opposition to immigration in order to preserve cultural homogeneity, as well as cultural protectionism.[87] The idea that minorities 'steal' jobs and disrupt 'values' capitalizes on an anxiety that

84 Charu Gupta, 'Hindu women, Muslim men: love jihad and conversions', *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 44, no. 51, 2009, 13–15.

85 Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press 2005).

86 Jens Rydgren, 'The sociology of the radical right', *Annual Review of Sociology,* vol. 33, no. 1, 2007, 241–62.

87 Don Kalb, 'Introduction: headlines of nation, subtexts of class: working-class populism and the return of the repressed in neoliberal Europe', in Don Kalb and Gábor Halmai (eds), *Headlines of Nation, Subtexts of Class: Working-Class Populism and the Return of the Repressed in Neoliberal Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 2011), 1–36; Art, *Inside the Radical Right*; Ellinas, *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe*; Mabel Berezin, *Illiberal Politics in Neoliberal Times: Culture, Security and Populism in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009); Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007); Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*; Hans-Georg Betz, 'Contemporary right-wing radicalism in Europe', *Contemporary European History,* vol. 8, no. 2, 1999, 299–316.

views immigrants as a threat to ethnonationalist identity.[88] Just as right-wing extremist parties in Europe employ a reactionary discourse of 'us versus them', seizing on ethnonational identity as a shared defence against fear of the unknown (namely the foreigner), the BJP similarly advocates the defence of national values against the threat of foreign invasion, particularly Muslim migrants deemed a threat to these values. Importantly, such threats need not actually endanger ethnonational identity if they are perceived as doing so. In turn, the centre-left political elite, that is, the Congress Party, are targeted for neglecting the 'common' values of the people.

Throughout the 2014 campaign, Modi subtly linked Hindutva with citizenship. He maintained ties to Hindu socio-cultural practices and rituals by merging them with voting behaviour. According to Christophe Jaffrelot: 'He associated himself with Hindu symbols and personalities. Besides wearing saffron clothes in some of the most important occasions of the election campaign, Modi visited many Hindu sacred places before his meetings.'[89] By vernacularizing the language of Hindutva, 'nation' and 'citizenship' shifted meaning to include localized narratives conflating Hindu symbols with political demands through an everyday brand of 'saffron politics'.[90] Such expressions of Modi's ethno-religiosity constituted a basis for belonging, as opposed to the corrupt, secular political and media establishment.

Despite this newfound anti-establishment message, the BJP had historically attracted upper-caste white-collar workers, professionals, merchants and other middle- to upper-class groups by weaving an exclusionary narrative built on in-group differences:[91]

> The political culture of the Hindu middle class is largely imbued with ethnoreligious connotations. This development has resulted from the need to compensate with some religiosity for an increasingly pervasive form of materialism after years of double-digit growth rates. But it reflects also the influence of years of Hindutva politics and the fear of Islam(ism), especially after the terrorist attacks of the last decade. The middle class tend to use its new financial means to protect itself from the influence of outsiders … [reflecting] the uneasy way in which the middle class relates to others, including religious minorities.[92]

88   Rydgren, 'The sociology of the radical right'; Roger Eatwell, 'Ten theories of the extreme right', in Peter H. Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (eds), *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass 2003), 47–73.
89   Jaffrelot, 'The Modi-centric BJP 2014 election campaign', 160.
90   Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, NJ and Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press 1999); Rajagopal, *Politics after Television*.
91   This is likely due to the fact that the elite and the intelligentsia comprised the BJP's founding leadership.
92   Christophe Jaffrelot, 'The class element in the 2014 Indian election and the BJP's success with special reference to the Hindi belt', *Studies in Indian Politics*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2015, 19–38 (24).

With Modi's victory, however, one cannot simply situate BJP supporters as solely upper-caste and urban-based. The BJP's success can partly be attributed to the diversification of the party. In 2014 it reached beyond its traditional demographic to a group with rising socio-economic means in the wake of India's neoliberal globalization: the neo-middle class. For the neo-middle class, the BJP, and Modi in particular, represent an opportunity for upward mobility through simultaneous material achievement and communal identity.[93] This change in BJP support reflects how Hindutva can manifest as a fluid ideology that appeals to a wide audience in contemporary India: as a frame for economic neoliberalism, while also espousing a religio-mythic narrative. This multifaceted approach ensured a growing, sustainable collective identity that normalized Hindutva within Indian society.

The 'mainstreaming' of Hindutva[94] can be compared to the 'mainstreaming' in the West of right-wing extremist views that are initiated on the margin or fringe and spread to political parties through practices, discourses and frames.[95] This phenomenon in India has resulted in a strategic coalition of religious groups and the neo-middle classes, described as a new cultural identitarian political movement that emerged out of the neoliberal political economy.[96] Thus, even though Hindutva began to be mainstream in the 1990s, under Modi it is arguably more widely accepted across all socio-economic classes in Indian society. Yet the BJP may be far from consolidating its position as a mainstream party for two reasons. First, it cannot dissolve the Hindutva agenda that is salient to its core group of supporters eager for its implementation in government. Second, the BJP remains part of a larger network of Hindutva organizations operating in the political milieu.[97] Nonetheless, the mainstreaming of Hindutva in India today has allowed for expressions of an exclusionary nationalist discourse previously confined to the fringe.

What then are the implications of Hindutva dominating Indian party politics during the current Modi government as well as for the *longue durée* of Indian society? Since the 2014 election, a clear tension marks the BJP's strategy to appear inclusive in order to maintain its electoral success while continuing

93   Ibid.; Palshikar, 'The BJP and Hindu nationalism', 732.
94   Christophe Jaffrelot and Ingrid Therwath, 'The Sangh Parivar and the Hindu diaspora in the West: what kind of "long-distance nationalism"?', *International Political Sociology*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2007, 278–95.
95   Hainsworth, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*; Aristotle Kallis, 'Far-right "contagion" or a failing "mainstream"? How dangerous ideas cross borders and blur boundaries', *Democracy and Security*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2013, 221–46; Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange and Matthijs Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (London and New York: Routledge 2016).
96   Pradeep Chhibber, 'Who voted for the Bharatiya Janata Party?', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1997, 631–39; Sebastian Schwecke, *New Cultural Identitarian Political Movements in Developing Societies: The Bharatiya Janata Party* (London and New York: Routledge 2011).
97   Palshikar, 'The BJP and Hindu nationalism'.

to promote Hindutva as its ideological legacy.[98] Despite an overt effort not to overemphasize Hindutva, however, the party has thus far failed to take a centrist approach.[99] In some states, the BJP has implemented a Hindutva agenda in the cultural and educational spheres (in school texts, for example),[100] as well as cow protection campaigns.[101] Other acts include

> attacks on places of worship, delegitimising of inter-faith marriages, privileging of Hindu symbols and identities, equating of Hindu identity with national identity and, perhaps most dramatically and contentiously, challenging the right to propagate religion by running a campaign that seeks to convert Muslim and Christian families 'back' to Hinduism.[102]

Also widespread is the censorship of journalists and academics critical of the government, many of whom are subsequently branded as 'antinational'.[103] Furthermore, the BJP government has renamed cities, streets and airports after Hindu figures,[104] and controversy ensued when flight crew on Air India were asked to proclaim *Jai Hind* (Long Live India) at the end of every flight announcement in order to promote the 'mood of the nation'.[105]

The BJP government has also faced controversies around ministerial appointments, first with Gajendra Chauhan and later Anupam Kher as chair of the Governing Council of the Film and Television Institute of India within the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The appointments of Chauhan and Kher, both of whom lack the necessary professional experience for the role, were viewed as an attempt by the BJP to introduce an ideological agenda in official government cinema documentation and education.[106] But perhaps the most controversial figure in the Modi-led BJP is Yogi Adityanath,

98   Ibid., 721.
99   Ibid., 727.
100 Shruti Jain, 'Rajasthan textbooks revised to glorify Modi government', 16 June 2017, available on *The Wire* website at https://thewire.in/education/rajasthan-textbooks-revised-glorify-modi-government (viewed 22 May 2020).
101 Human Rights Watch, 'Violent cow protection in India', 18 February 2019, available on the *Human Rights Watch* website at www.hrw.org/report/2019/02/18/violent-cow-protection-india/vigilante-groups-attack-minorities (viewed 2 June 2020).
102 Palshikar, 'The BJP and Hindu nationalism', 728.
103 Maya Prabhu, 'Is free speech under threat in Modi's India?', 3 August 2017, available on the *Al Jazeera* website at www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/07/free-speech-threat-modi-india-170712131837718.html (viewed 2 June 2020).
104 Rizwan Ahmad, 'Renaming India: saffronisation of public spaces', 12 October 2018, available on the *Al Jazeera* website at www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/renaming-india-saffronisation-public-spaces-181012113039066.html (viewed 2 June 2020).
105 Vanessa Romo, 'Air India crew directed to "Hail the Motherland" after every announcement', 5 March 2019, available on the *NPR* website at www.npr.org/2019/03/05/700512781/air-india-crews-directed-to-hail-the-motherland-after-every-announcement (viewed 2 June 2020).
106 Not unwarranted considering parallels with the making of Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, her propaganda film glorifying the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

who was elected Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 2017. A Hindutva hardliner, Adityanath has at times criticized the BJP for diluting Hindutva ideology, while inciting violence against Muslims and making derogatory remarks about women and homosexuality.[107]

The landslide re-election of Modi and the BJP in 2019, with an even greater majority than in 2014, signalled that Hindutva was no longer in the process of becoming but *had become* mainstream. In short, it has achieved a degree of normalcy and legitimacy that is not merely imposed but widely supported. Indeed, the government's recent action in revoking Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which gives special status to the region of Jammu and Kashmir—an area disputed by India, Pakistan and China—represents the Modi administration's fulfilment of a Hindutva ambition to restore *Akhand Bharat*.[108] Hindutva is ultimately the outcome of a continuing trend in Indian society that will likely persist in the future.

A universal framework for right-wing extremism

This article fills a lacuna in the scholarship concerning right-wing extremism by situating within it the ideological, historical and organizational dimensions of Hindutva. It begins by highlighting a theoretical and empirical gap in studies of right-wing extremism as largely limited to European and North American case studies, and argues that western scholars have misrepresented Hindutva in India as a type of religious extremism. This interpretation stems from misunderstanding Hindutva as a religious phenomenon rather than as the politicization of religion in which being Hindu is equated with an ethnonationalist identity. On the other hand, South Asian scholars tend to analyse Hindutva as an isolated case, rarely looking beyond regional studies for comparison.

On this basis, this article is an attempt to universalize the phenomenon of right-wing extremism. It does not disregard the circumstantial origin, evolution and adaptation of Hindutva, but illustrates this development as being mutually intertwined with Italian Fascism and German Nazism. While Hindutva ideologues incorporated elements of European extreme-right models for its *modus operandi*, intellectuals in Europe, in turn, engaged with Hindutva actors to further their own ideological development. By situating Hindutva in relation to the European context, transgressing a geographical boundary, its right-wing extremist ideology can be perceived as having a transnational

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107 See Christophe Jaffrelot, 'India's democracy at 70: toward a Hindu state?', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2017, 52–63 (58–9).

108 Kapil Komireddi, 'The Kashmir crisis isn't about territory. It's about a Hindu victory over Islam', 16 August 2019, available on the *Washington Post* website at www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/the-kashmir-crisis-isnt-about-territory-its-about-a-hindu-victory-over-islam/2019/08/16/ab84ffe2-bf79-11e9-a5c6-1e74f7ec4a93_story.html (viewed 2 June 2020).

nature. Ideological and, at times, physical connections occurred within a continuous cycle of engagements between European and South Asian political milieux.

Following India's independence, the scale of communal riots that accompanied the founding of India as a Hindu-majority nation and Pakistan as a Muslim-majority nation led Hindutva actors to justify violence as furthering an ethnonational claim for *Akhand Bharat* (Undivided India), the restoration of lost territory. As such, violence against the threat of Otherness became a legitimate means of preserving the 'motherland'. The evolution of Hindutva in postcolonial India parallels European theories of ethnonationalism (that is, geography, race, religion, culture, language) for justifying ethnic superiority over 'foreigners', namely Muslims, who are viewed as 'invaders' of the 'pure' Hindu nation and must be eradicated or 'converted' back to Hinduism. In European countries, the evolution of right-wing extremism after the Second World War has similarly relied on defining an Other, primarily through the racialization of difference. By projecting individual fear of an unknown 'foreign' entity as a national fear, Hindutva and European right-wing extremism simultaneously formulate such threats, whether actual or perceived, as a danger to collective identity. Yet, whereas European right-wing extremism was confined to the political fringe, Hindutva has been visible in nation-building and majoritarian identity in India.

Lastly, this article highlights the 'mainstreaming' effect of right-wing extremism from the fringe to electoral politics by showcasing the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the only political party with Hindutva as its official ideology. The 'adaptation dilemma' of the BJP has not been without its pitfalls, however, as evident during the 2002 Gujarat riots that revealed how state-sponsored violence assisted in the construction of Hindutva majoritarian nationalism. Thereafter, the BJP only succeeded in local and state elections until 2014, when the party secured an outright majority in the national election with its candidate and now prime minister, Narendra Modi. Modi's campaign galvanized mass support among the Indian populace by projecting an image of the 'authentic' Indian nation. It importantly did so by positioning Muslims as a threat to the Hindu majority, eliciting a narrative of cultural protectionism against the threatening Other, similar to narratives employed by European right-wing extremist parties. Under Modi's government, the success of the BJP as a political party with an overt Hindutva agenda has not only mainstreamed exclusionary nationalism at the ballot box, but has also allowed for expressions of Otherness to become increasingly acceptable in a historically diverse society. The marking of Hindus as 'insiders' and other religious groups as 'outsiders' has constructed Hindutva as synonymous with Indian nationalism.

This article thus provides not only an overview of Hindutva, but also an analytical contribution towards how we might conceptualize right-wing extremism in its transnational manifestations. Such a theoretical intervention is timely given the current wave of global right-wing extremism in western

societies as well as its becoming a powerful force in the world's largest (postcolonial) democracy.

Eviane Leidig is a postdoctoral fellow at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society and an affiliate at the Center for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo. Her current research focuses on transnational online connections of the far right, particularly between Europe/North America and India. Email: eviane.leidig@mf.no. ORCID http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1904-0462