Reconfiguring nationalism: Transnational entanglements of *Hindutva* and radical right ideology

Eviane Leidig

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Department of Sociology and Human Geography
Faculty of Social Sciences
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Dedicated to Professor Vernon F. Leidig,

who taught me how to listen.
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<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Bharatiya Janata Party</td>
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<td>HSC</td>
<td>Hindu Students Council</td>
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<td>HSS</td>
<td>Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh</td>
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<td>HSS UK</td>
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<td>HSS USA</td>
<td>Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA</td>
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<td>NHSF</td>
<td>National Hindu Students Forum</td>
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<td>NSD</td>
<td>Norwegian Centre for Research Data</td>
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<td>OFBJP</td>
<td>Overseas Friends of BJP</td>
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<tr>
<td>OFBJP UK</td>
<td>Overseas Friends of BJP UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>OFBJP USA</td>
<td>Overseas Friends of BJP USA</td>
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<td>RHC</td>
<td>Republican Hindu Coalition</td>
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<td>RSS</td>
<td>Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh</td>
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<tr>
<td>VHP</td>
<td>Vishwa Hindu Parishad</td>
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<td>VHPA</td>
<td>Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>VHP UK</td>
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Glossary

_Akhand Bharat_ Translates to Undivided India.
An irredentist term referring to territory covering modern
nation-states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal,
Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Afghanistan.

_Bharatiya Jana Sangh_ Translates to Indian People’s Association.
Founded in 1951 as precursor to Bharatiya Janata Party.
Dissolved in 1977.

_Bharatiya Janata Party_ Translates to Indian People’s Party.
Founded in 1980 as the only political party that has
adopted Hindutva as its official ideology.

_Dharma_ Term in Hinduism, loosely translates to the right way of
living.

_Hindu Sena_ Translates to Hindu Army.
Founded in 2011.

_Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh_ Translates to Hindu Volunteer Organisation.
Subsidiary of _Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh_ for Hindus
outside India.

_Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh UK_ Founded in 1966 as UK branch.

_Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA_ Founded in 1989 as US branch.

_Hindu Students Council_ Founded in 1987 as university division of _Vishwa Hindu
Parishad_ of America

_Hindutva_ Translates to Hindu nationalism.

_National Hindu Students Forum_ Founded in 1991 as university branch of _Hindu
Swayamsevak Sangh UK_.

_Overseas Friends of Bharatiya Janata Party_ Subsidiary of _Bharatiya Janata Party_ for Hindus outside of
India.


_Rashtra_ Translates to state. Often used to refer to a Hindu _rashtra_.

_Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh_ Translates to National Volunteer Organisation.
Founded in 1925 as first _Hindutva_ organisation with
grassroots paramilitary operandi.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Republican Hindu Coalition</td>
<td>Founded in 2015 as US advocacy organisation to promote Hindu American interests.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saffron terror</td>
<td>Used to describe acts of violence committed in the name of Hindutva, with the symbolic use of the saffron colour by Hindutva organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangh Parivar</td>
<td>Translates to Family of Organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewa</td>
<td>Term in Hinduism, loosely translates to service to the poor and suffering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakha</td>
<td>Translates to branch or cell. The organisational unit of the RSS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vishwa Hindu Parishad UK</td>
<td>Founded in 1969 as UK branch.</td>
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Summary

This dissertation explores a minority within the Indian diaspora who support the ideological agenda of the radical right in the West. It situates the Brexit referendum and process in the UK, and Trump’s election and presidency in the US, as manifestations of the radical right which provided an opportunity to merge the ideological currents of Hindutva (or Hindu nationalism)—an ideology originating from India—with these phenomena. Thus, this dissertation traces the transnational ideological linkages between Hindutva and the Western radical right. It positions the role of diaspora networks as interlocutors in adapting Hindutva towards Western political contexts, in effect creating alliances with radical right actors. United by shared practices of exclusion, this results in the reconfiguring of nationalist imaginaries made possible by transnational entanglements.

The dissertation consists of five articles that follow an overview of the background, the theoretical framework, and the methodological approaches of the study. The background provides historical and contemporary context of the evolution of Hindutva, its reformulation with the diaspora, and its convergence with the Brexit and Trump campaigns. The dissertation then draws upon theoretical insights in nationalism scholarship, as well as studies of diaspora and of the radical right, focusing on the conceptual overlaps between these fields in order to establish an intellectual foundation for the topic. Lastly, it employs a combined methodological approach that utilises genealogy, qualitative content analysis on social media, quantitative social media analysis, and semi-structured interviews as a means of demonstrating how ideology is operationalised at multiple scales.

The first article introduces Hindutva into the terminology of right-wing extremism. It argues that the origins and development of Hindutva need to be understood not as processes simply taking place locally, in isolation, but in fact deeply connected to extreme right movements in the West. The subsequent growth and ‘mainstreaming’ of Hindutva has been instrumental in nation-building and in creating a majoritarian identity in India. By situating the ideological, historical, and organisational dimensions of Hindutva, this article provides an analytical contribution towards how we might conceptualise right-wing extremism in its global manifestations rather than just a Western phenomenon.
The second article traces the ideological linkages between diaspora Hindutva and the contemporary radical right in Western societies. It positions diaspora political participation and mobilisation online as not only a form of long-distance nationalism towards India: equally important is the role of minority identity formation in ‘host societies’. Such practices of identity formation can be inherently exclusionary, thus creating an alliance between diaspora Hindutva and radical right actors on the shared basis of ‘othering’. This article sheds light on processes of ideological hybridity between diaspora communities and the nationalist narratives of the Brexit and Trump agendas.

The third article discusses how Indian diaspora actors employ Western radical right discourse online. It explores how these actors engage with issues and rhetoric in the Brexit and Trump Twittersphere(s) in order to shape ideas, strategies, and agendas within this network. In doing so, these actors adapt narratives of diaspora Hindutva into local political contexts as a means of justifying support for radical right platforms. Importantly, it is not just diasporic Hindus, but also Sikhs and Christians, sometimes united by an anti-Muslim stance, who participate in this process. This article illustrates how Indian diaspora actors are creating new boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within radical right nationalist imaginaries.

The fourth article examines how Indian diaspora actors embed themselves into the British and American radical right online milieux. By analysing Twitter activity of diaspora users, it reveals the vast and interconnected network of radical right communities that are transnationally oriented. As a result, these communities are key nodes in building bridges for information exchange between users. This article finds that in perpetuating and circulating tropes and narratives of the radical right online, Indian diaspora actors rely on transnational dynamics to further exclusionary nationalist aims.

The fifth article addresses the negotiation between long-distance nationalist and nationalist attachments amongst Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump in the UK and US. Through interviews, it unpacks the complex associations that some individuals hold towards their countries of origin/descent versus their countries of settlement/residence. In order to make sense of their positioning, these diaspora actors construct and maintain boundaries that not only depend on transnational ties, but cement nationalist sentiments. This article highlights how Indian diaspora actors simultaneously articulate not competing, but complementary nationalisms, when articulating support for Brexit and Trump.
Acknowledgements

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have been impossible. I appreciate all your efforts and dedication towards ensuring my stay was productive.

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1 Introduction

On 12 May 2016, a group of worshippers gathered in New Delhi performing a havan puja (a fire ceremony aimed to bring good fortune), chanting mantras to invoke the gods. Surrounded by statues of Hindu deities, incense, and offerings was the focal point of the puja: a blown up photo of Donald Trump adorned with vermillion. Behind the worshippers a banner reads ‘he is hope for humanity against Islamic terror’. The event was organised by the Hindu Sena (or Hindu Army), a fringe extreme right group. The leader of the Hindu Sena, Vishnu Gupta, stated ‘He’s our hero. We are praying for Trump because he is the only one who can help mankind’ (The Guardian).

Five months later, the Republican presidential candidate walked on stage in a convention centre in Edison, New Jersey to an audience holding signs such as ‘Trump Great for India’, ‘Trump for Hindu Americans’, and ‘Trump Against Terror’. As Trump entered, the song ‘God Bless the USA’ blasted on the loudspeaker and he proceeded to light a diya (an oil lamp that symbolises purity, goodness, and good luck) along with prominent Hindu Americans. The rally, entitled ‘Humanity United Against Terror’, was hosted by an advocacy group called the Republican Hindu Coalition whose founder donated $1 million to Trump’s campaign.

These two events represent an enigma that this dissertation unravels and builds upon. It situates the possibility of a maverick US presidential candidate to inspire a group of Hindu nationalists in India. It explains why that same candidate spoke at a rally targeting Indian Americans—who constitute only 1% of the US population—just three weeks before election day. By exploring this phenomenon, this dissertation looks beyond how nationalist ideology operates within national borders, or even cross-nationally, and instead unpacks how transnational dynamics occur through multi-sited entanglements in order to reconfigure nationalist imaginaries.

It begins by exploring historical entanglements between ideologues in India and Europe. It posits how the development of Hindutva, an ideology that promotes Hindu nationalism in India, arose out of sustained intellectual engagement between ideologues in India and their counterparts in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. By consolidating around ideas of ethnie and primordialism, this fostered a truly transnational collaboration built on the basis of a shared commitment to ethno-nationalism.
It then positions sustained entanglements between actors in the Indian diaspora and those in India. It traces how the evolution of Hindutva overseas parallels migrant journeys from those seeking long-distance nationalist ties to the homeland. Over time, the connection between India and the diaspora shifted from a linear trajectory into a continuous feedback loop of active engagement. An ideology became transformed through the purveyors of a global network. However, as successive generations of these migrants settled in their countries of residence creating diaspora communities, these actors modified Hindutva to local contexts. The resulting outcome of diaspora Hindutva was thus as much an invocation of long-distance nationalism as a response to the creation of narratives of belonging within ‘host societies’.

Lastly, it situates contemporary entanglements between actors in the Indian diaspora and the radical right in the West. Through the process of defining who belongs within a nationalist imaginary, proponents of diaspora Hindutva have sought allies with Western radical right actors. The result is a convergence of Hindutva and radical right ideology made possible by the role of diaspora actors who act as translators, by not only adapting, but also creating new exclusionary narratives influenced from the homeland towards their countries of settlement/residence.

This dissertation empirically explores Indian diaspora supporters of the Brexit referendum and process in the UK and Trump’s election and presidency in the US. It should be acknowledged that the number of Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump is rather marginal—approximately 41% in the UK and 16% in the US respectively. This is therefore not a study of the views of British Indian and Indian American communities more broadly, but instead a case study that explores those in the Indian diaspora who support Brexit and Trump as manifestations of Western radical right agendas.

The overarching research question of this dissertation is thus:

How, and to what extent, does a minority within the Indian diaspora support the radical right in the West?

By asking how, we can situate the ways in which people adapt and transform an ideology to fit their everyday realities. We can trace practices of meaning-making that arise out of defining boundaries of
inclusion and exclusion. And importantly, we can begin to understand the scale and scope of interactions that lead to the creation of new imagined communities.

Over the course of five articles, this dissertation explores these issues with the following respective research questions:

1. How does Hindutva fit within Western definitions of the radical right? Can such definitions be considered universal?
2. How do Indian diaspora actors create an ideological linkage between diaspora Hindutva and the radical right in the West?
3. How do Indian diaspora actors employ Western radical right discourse online?
4. How do Indian diaspora actors embed themselves into the radical right online milieu in the West?
5. How do Indian diaspora actors negotiate between long-distance nationalist and nationalist attachments when supporting radical right agendas in the West?

These five articles of the dissertation provide different types of insight into the overall research question. Whilst the first article serves as a conceptual foundation of Hindutva vis-à-vis radical right ideology in the West, the following four explore the role of Indian diaspora actors who act as mediators in bridging and synthesising these ideologies. The confluence of Hindutva and Western radical right agendas furthers the reproduction of not competing, but complementary nationalisms.

This dissertation finds that not only are transnational dynamics integral towards the (re)construction of exclusionary nationalist imaginaries, but also results in ideological hybridity. Using a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches, it explores how the political opportunities of Brexit and Trump created a perfect storm for the merging of diaspora Hindutva and Western radical right platforms at a transnational scale made possible by diaspora networks. It situates the multiple ways in which the exclusionary nationalist ideologies of these movements are advanced by a small segment of political entrepreneurs with global ties. As such, this dissertation highlights how a minority of individuals, past and present, can have a great impact within and beyond territorial boundaries.
This introductory part of the dissertation consists of seven chapters. Following this chapter, chapter 2 details the contextual background which gave rise to the phenomenon under study. It traces the emergence of *Hindutva* as an ideology in India, and its proliferation and reformulation overseas with the diaspora, eventually leading to the convergence of diaspora *Hindutva* and the political opportunities of the Brexit and Trump campaigns as manifestations of radical right agendas in the West. Chapter 3 then outlines the theoretical framework of the dissertation, namely, theories of nationalism and the conceptual interlinkages between nationalism and diaspora, as well as nationalism and the radical right. Chapter 4 discusses the research design and methodological approaches employed in this dissertation, consisting of genealogy, qualitative content analysis on social media, quantitative social media analysis, and semi-structured interviews. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the five articles encompassing the dissertation. Lastly, chapter 6 offers concluding remarks on future avenues for research. The five articles are attached at the end.
2 Background

The background chapter of this dissertation draws upon scholarship in three areas: the historical evolution and present day formation of Hindutva in India; the emergence of diaspora Hindutva as both long-distance nationalism and a response to multiculturalism as a policy agenda; and the political opportunities of the Brexit and Trump campaigns in 2016 to merge Hindutva narratives with Anglo-Western radical right agendas.

It begins by exploring Hindutva as an ideology that arose and was cemented through actors and the formation of organisations which have played an integral role in helping to construct ethno-nationalism in India. Originating as an anti-colonial resistance movement, early Hindutva ideologues evoked the idea of ‘Hindu consciousness’ in order to consolidate a majoritarian identity. This took shape in the establishment of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, or National Volunteer Organisation) in 1925, which sought to create a Hindu rashtra (or state) on the basis of claiming territoriality according to ethnic Hindu-ness. This endeavour did not exist as an isolated phenomenon, but rather in conjunction with ideological developments in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, such that South Asian and European political spheres were interconnected in their intellectual engagements.

Following India’s independence, Hindutva expanded through the development of new organisations under the umbrella of the Sangh Parivar (or Family of Organisations), which became instrumental towards the myth making of nation-building. The emergence of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, or World Hindu Council) in 1964 as a ‘cultural organisation’ played an especially prominent role in equating Hindu identity with Indian identity. Also significant was the founding of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, or Indian People’s Party) in 1980, serving as the only political party which has adopted Hindutva as its official ideology. Under the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP has successfully mainstreamed Hindutva, weaving the narrative that promises India’s future as a techno-economic powerhouse with the authenticity of Modi as the voice of the people.

Hindutva, however, has not been merely confined to the boundaries of the Indian nation-state. This chapter thus follows how the ideology has travelled overseas with migrant trajectories, beginning in southern and eastern Africa, to the Caribbean, and then to Western countries. It details the rise of diaspora Hindutva organisations, particularly in the UK and US, as playing a role in shaping and
adapting Hindutva within local contexts in order to respond to the needs of migrants seeking long-distance nationalist ties ‘back home’. Yet, this relationship can be characterised not as a one-way trajectory, but a continuous cycle of engagement between the homeland and the diaspora. A key way in which the diaspora influences its Indian parent organisations is through the language of multiculturalism, in the form of majority-minority rhetoric and a politics of recognition, which has been adapted by Hindutva actors in India. The irony is that multiculturalism policies developed in Western societies in order to redress historically marginalised and discriminated ethnic and racial communities has become exploited by diaspora Hindutva organisations in order to advance an exclusionary ideology. The discourse of Hindutva thus needs to be understood in its transnational linkages.

The Brexit referendum and Trump’s election in 2016 served as conjunctures which brought to the fore the latency of diaspora Hindutva as complementary to radical right agendas in Anglo-Western societies. Here, a new form of mobilisation emerged amongst the diaspora, which was articulated as pro-Commonwealth (and anti-EU) migration with the Brexit vote, and strong US-India relations on trade and cooperation against Islamist extremism with Trump’s platform. Equally striking was how the diaspora mobilised on social media in response to these ideas, doing so in a way which connected diaspora Hindutva narratives to radical right themes. The result is an ideological hybridity framed according to exclusionary nationalist imaginaries.

The Origins and Evolution of Hindutva in India

Colonial India and the emergence of Hindutva

Hindutva emerged as an ideology in the 19th century in resistance to British colonialism in India. It took shape as a reform then revivalist movement of neo-Hinduism in distinct opposition to British occupation. The idea of a Vedic ‘golden age’, or height of Hinduism when the Vedas scriptures were written and brought to northern India, crystallised during this time. Hindutva ideologues thus idolise a past that existed prior to the Mughal Empire and British Raj, attempting to rewrite a historiographical account which highlights the ‘shame’ of foreign invasion (see Jaffrelot, 2007; Bhatt, 2001).
In 1925, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS, or National Volunteer Organisation) was founded with the aim to create a Hindu *rashtra* (or state). Its founders articulated the Hindu *rashtra* as encompassing a territorial nation-state in which the criteria for belonging is an inherent ethno-religious identity. In the decades that followed with the rise of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, *Hindutva* ideologues remained in contact with their European contemporaries, influencing what would later become the modus operandi for the RSS. For instance, the RSS until this day runs *shakhas*, or branches, which recruits volunteers in local chapters, modeled after the fascist paramilitary under Mussolini (Casolari, 2000). Such transnational ideological and organisational connections persisted through diplomatic ties, private correspondences, newspaper editorials, radio broadcasts, intellectual networks, and book publications (see Casolari, 2000; Goodrick-Clarke, 1998; D’souza, 2000; Zachariah, 2015, 2014). Thus, despite *Hindutva* emerging within a particular temporal-spatial milieu, its growth incorporated elements from European models. In turn, significant interactions with European political spheres helped foster a global ideological project based on a primordialist conception of ethno-nationalism.

**Independent India and the growth of Hindutva**

With the end of British colonialism in 1947 came the formation of the modern nation-states of Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan through Partition of the subcontinent. The violence which marked the birth of these new nations has become instrumental towards their myth making in creating nationalist imaginaries. At the heart of this myth making process for *Hindutva* ideologues is the notion of *Akhand Bharat* (or Undivided India), by which the territorial boundaries of India and Pakistan (and later Bangladesh) are once again reunited under the *rashtra*. ‘Saffron terror’—the term commonly given to designate the prominence of the colour saffron as a symbol of *Hindutva*—is enacted by *Hindutva* actors as a means of claiming public space as Hindu space. Violence committed in the name of *Hindutva* has thus remained consistently visible in nation-building efforts.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the RSS grew into a network of *Hindutva* organisations called the *Sangh Parivar* (or Family of Organisations). Together, the affiliates of the *Sangh* pursue and promote *Hindutva* through a vast apparatus. One of the largest organisations of the *Sangh*, the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP, or World Hindu Council), was founded in 1964 by RSS members and Hindu religious leaders. Its objectives include raising awareness of ‘Hindu Society’, instilling ‘Hindu values’, connecting and reconnecting with the Hindu diaspora and those ‘who had gone out of the Hindu fold’, providing
social welfare services, reforming Hinduism in modernity, and abolishing untouchability (van der Veer, 1994, 653-4).

Although the VHP is a descendent of the RSS, which has taken an active role in organising political rituals for the VHP, there are key differences between the two. The RSS promotes physical strength of young men through military exercises that enhance masculinity, such that a ‘healthy body’ equates to a ‘healthy nation’. Authoritarianism is strongly enforced at all levels. The VHP, however, is organisationally and structurally different. It is guided by religious leaders who wish to unify a ‘modern Hinduism’ (ibid., 655). The VHP defines Hinduism as a civilisation, rather than a religion, and consequently promotes ‘modern Hinduism’ as a form of nationalism (ibid.). Accordingly, Hindu identity is Indian identity, and any other religion (i.e. Islam, Christianity) is a ‘foreign’ threat to the Hindu nation-state.

Another significant organisation in the Sangh is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, or Indian People’s Party), the only political party that has adopted Hindutva as its official ideology. Originally founded in 1951 as the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in response to the governing centre-left Indian National Congress party, it was reformed in 1980 as a more moderate, populist party, yet still retaining the Hindutva mission. Since independence, the BJP has only succeeded in local and state elections except for a coalition in national government from 1998 to 2004. This changed in 2014 as the BJP secured an outright majority with its candidate Narendra Modi.

**Modi’s India and contemporary Hindutva**

During the 2014 election, the BJP candidate and now Prime Minister Narendra Modi gained mass support through a charismatic persona and populist appeal, attacking the political and media establishment in order to portray himself as the voice of the people (see Jaffrelot, 2015a). Modi came to symbolise the image of an authentic India, employing extensive social media operations (Ahmed, Jaidka, & Cho, 2016; Chadha & Guha, 2016; Pal, Chandra, & Vydiswaran, 2016; Pal, 2015; Rajagopal, 2014) in order to appear transparent, accountable, and accessible. By doing so, Modi embodied the vision of India aiming to be a 21st century technological powerhouse on the global stage.
Interlaced with Modi’s populist message is mobilising support on the idea of a Muslim ‘threat’ to the Hindu majority, particularly from neighbouring Bangladesh and Pakistan in which migrants from these countries are portrayed as foreign invaders intent on destroying Hindu civilisation with acts of Islamic terrorism. Indian Muslims are simultaneously viewed as complicit in this alleged plot, furthering an anti-nationalist agenda. Under Modi’s government, such tropes have become mainstream, legitimised by a government that promotes *Hindutva* as synonymous with Indian nationalism. *Hindutva*, however, has not been confined to the boundaries of India. The next section explores the growth and expansion of *Hindutva* as an ideology that interlaces ‘both “roots” and “routes”’ (Alexander, 2017, 1544) of the diaspora.

**Diaspora Hindutva**

From the mid-20th century, patterns of migration and settlement from India to the diaspora interlinked with a shifting global economy. Consequently, *Hindutva* traversed with diasporic trajectories:

the transnationalization of [*Hindutva*] initially occurred in an unplanned and contingent manner, through individual initiatives and pre-existing family networks, before becoming part of a planned effort from India. The first shakha outside India was set up in 1947, aboard a ship bound for Kenya, by Jagdish Chandra Sharda, also known as Shastri. During the next decade (1947-1957), Shastri and his like-minded friends went to Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, where they opened new local chapters of the RSS, thus setting up the first overseas extension of the Indian network (Sharda, 2008). Through their personal contacts, branches of the Sangh Parivar were also started in Burma, Mauritius and Madagascar (Bhatt, 2000: 559-593). These East African beginnings are not insignificant for understanding the establishment of the Sangh Parivar in Western countries because numerous full-time members of the RSS who were going to operate in the United Kingdom and in North America had worked in Kenya (Therwath, 2012, 554).

The organic manner in which *Hindutva* spread overseas thus parallels migrant journeys from eastern and southern Africa, as well as the Caribbean where many had historically served as indentured labour under the empire. Following India’s independence, a vast number from the subcontinent emigrated to the UK, Canada, Australia, and later the US, in order to fulfil the demand for labour migrants to reconstruct post-Second World War economies (Miles & Phizacklea, 1984, 12). It was in the following decades that diaspora *Hindutva* organisations became firmly established as sites of community building around a shared minority identity in Anglo-Western societies.
It should be noted that although diaspora Hindutva can be viewed as a somewhat separate phenomenon from Hindutva in India, this does not mean that its diasporic formations have always existed in parallel. Early on, Hindutva actors in India have exercised considerable control over diasporic activities and operations. This is reflected in the close relationship of institutional oversight. Further, the role of the diaspora as funders has been significant for Hindutva organisations in India. The VHP in the US, for example, has provided millions of ‘saffron dollars’ by individuals and corporations to multiple front organisations of its Indian parent (Mathew, 2000). Another notable area of intervention includes the BJP’s appeal to the diaspora in election manifestos, whom have contributed sizeable donations as early as the 1996 election (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007, 287-9). Financial support for political projects in India is thus a highly effective contribution of the diaspora (Kamat & Mathew, 2003, 12; Mathew, 2000).

Perhaps most important is that Hindutva has provided comfort to a diaspora seeking to define itself in the West. For many, Hindutva organisations signal a moral compass amidst the ‘loss of Hindu identity, tradition, values and dharma in the face of Western materialism, consumption, permissiveness, immorality, corruption and the pursuit of lucre’ (Bhatt, 2000, 572). The demand from migrants to educate their children in Hindu traditions (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007) reflects an attempt to reconnect with the culture and values ‘back home’. The vulnerability of diasporic spaces to find one’s ‘roots’, however, allows easy access for Hindutva to flourish.

Significant in this venture was the rise of multiculturalism as a policy agenda which benefited diaspora Hindutva organisations in the UK and US. Hence, these organisations emerged not just in response to long-distance nationalist ties to India, but equally important was the role of multiculturalism in the growth of these organisations. The term ‘multiculturalism’ first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in Canada and Australia, and to some extent the UK and US, as a policy effort to politically accommodate minorities in Western societies (see Modood, 2016; Taylor, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995; Parekh, 2000). Where previously these ‘host societies’ would follow the model of ‘assimilation’ to accommodate minority communities, this was replaced with multiculturalism initiatives to foster cultural diversity in the name of ‘equality of difference’. Often phrased in the discourse of a ‘politics of recognition’, it frequently includes the notion of ‘integration’ whilst simultaneously recognising the plurality of various ‘communities’. Contemporary societies are multicultural in the sense that they contain multiple cultures, which are to be celebrated rather than simply tolerated (or opposed), and that they must be
given positive recognition in the public sphere. The aim of multiculturalism policies is thus to redress the historical underrepresentation and marginalisation of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities in public institutions, such as education and government.

Multiculturalism as a field of academic scholarship emerged in conjunction with, and frequently informed, policy initiatives (see Crowder, 2013). This included describing patterns of identity-making across generations in relation to ‘belonging’ to the nation whilst occupying liminal diaspora spaces. By translating these academic findings into policy, multiculturalism scholars sought to emancipate hegemonic cultural norms: ‘Indeed, the attack on colorblind, culture-neutral political concepts such as equality and citizenship, with the critique that ethnicity and culture cannot be confined to some so-called private sphere but shape political and opportunity structures in all societies, is one of the most fundamental claims made by multiculturalism and the politics of difference’ (Modood, 2016, 2).

Multiculturalism is not without its critics, who often describe it as a failure. The underlying argument is that it privileges certain minority groups under the guise of ‘political correctness’, viewed as inherently unequal in liberal democratic societies. More critical argumentations within the academy posit that the theoretical assumptions of multiculturalism, namely the Eurocentric specificity of the term (including individualist vs. groupist categorisations) reinforces a ‘majority-minority’ dichotomy. The result is that multiculturalism today ‘refers to particular discourses or social forms which incorporate marked cultural differences and diverse ethnicities… [which] comprise various uneven interventions to understand and find a national resolution of the unsettled relation between marked cultural differences’ (Hesse, 2000, 2). There is thus a risk of essentialising ‘difference’ in order to create specific, targeted policy interventions.

The following explores how British and American Hindutva organisations initially emerged as an expression of long-distance nationalism, but became successful due to policies of multiculturalism which favoured their development and expansion.¹

¹ It should be noted that this dissertation refrains from exploring the historical formation of Indian Sikh and Christian diaspora communities on two bases. Firstly, strong community mobilisation has historically been lacking due to areas of settlement where Sikhs and Christians constitute a minority in numbers compared to Hindus. Secondly, this dissertation focuses on the evolution of Hindutva in the diaspora rather than all forms of diasporic mobilisation. That said, the articles include discussion of Indian Sikh and Christian diaspora communities as an unexpected finding of research.
British Hindutva

Rising immigration, and consequently integration, became issues of national concern in the UK following the post-Second World War. The large arrival of migrants from the Commonwealth, mostly from Asia and Africa, came as a result of the British Nationality Act 1948. Under the new act, British citizenship was extended to individuals of the Commonwealth with the right to immigrate to the UK. A first wave to the UK following Partition, with many migrating from the Punjab and Gujarat regions in India, is linked to the aforementioned demand for labour migrants who helped build a nation recovering from the collapse of Empire and the need for a restructured economy. This first phase of migration cemented early experiences of racism and discrimination against these wage labourers. The public and political reaction to the vast influx of immigration was overwhelmingly negative, culminating in race riots. As a result, the rise of xenophobic sentiments in the British political and social milieux responded to these supposed inferior migrants as a “race/immigration” problem’ in the following decades (Miles & Phizacklea, 1984, 20-44). But the government’s commitment to citizenship ensured there was no significant immigration restriction until legislation in 1962 (and not again until 1968 and 1971). The basis for new immigration restrictions was an attempt to limit non-white immigration from the New Commonwealth (i.e. Africa and Asia) and instead encourage white immigration from the Old Commonwealth (i.e. Australia, New Zealand, and Canada) (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2017).

The primary response from government during this time period was a policy of assimilation, whereby it was assumed that non-white immigrants and ‘outsiders’ would conform to the norms and culture of the dominant ‘host society’. Such assimilationist policies defined the government’s outlook, which ‘utopianized the prospect of a British national identity preserved through the eventual cultural acceptance of the migrants into the putative British way of life, in exchange for the generational dissipation of ethnically marked cultural differences’ (Hesse, 2000, 6). Thus, as much as assimilation arose from rapid demographic changes in British society, it was likewise an effort to cement the notion of (white) Britishness. In other words, the ‘racialized reconstruction of Britain as an imagined community in the initial post-war period (1945-62) is partly characterized by developments in public culture which attempt to turn the common sense of Britain away from an imperial cosmopolitanism towards a nationalist parochialism’ (ibid., 5). As a nation reeling from the loss of empire and
decolonisation, anxiety over race and identity came to fruition with attempts to define who belonged to the British national imaginary.

During the mid-1960s, ‘assimilation’ gradually shifted to ‘integration’, in which equal opportunity, cultural diversity, and tolerance for minorities became implemented in legal and social institutions. Under the welfare state, funding was directed towards representing interests of minority communities (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2017). Although in some ways a departure from assimilation, it more or less served as an extension in which the underlying assumption was ‘policy interventions designed to support and encourage the ideal of the “non-white immigrant” disappearing into the norms and habits of (white) British culture’ (Hesse, 2000, 6). The aim was to promote ‘our’ dominant way of life over ‘their’ cultural practices.

It was also during this time that a slow and steady presence of diaspora Hindutva organisations came to fruition, such as the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS, or Hindu Volunteer Organisation) UK, which was founded in London in 1966 by an RSS migrant. HSS UK emulates its RSS parent in ideology, structure, and organisation (Bhatt, 2000, 577-8). Like the RSS, HSS UK has a centralised structure with regional sections, a leadership council that meets annually, and a central executive committee that convenes every three months. HSS UK also holds training camps for leadership building (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007, 282).

In 1969, another diaspora Hindutva organisation, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) UK, was founded in order to promote ‘Hindu consciousness amongst migrant groups’ (Zavos, 2010, 7). VHP UK has five clear objectives which comprise of spreading awareness of dharma (loosely defined as the right way of living); providing seva (or social services) to those in need; promoting relationships with other faith groups; being a voice for the global Hindu community; training Hindu priests; and working with and providing support to VHP affiliates in other countries (VHP UK website, 2017). Unlike the VHP in India, which engages in violence against religious minorities and exercises aggressive and militant Hindutva, the profile of the VHP diaspora network is to formulate an ideological political discourse and construct a global Hindu community identity (Zavos, 2010; Mukta, 2000). It does so by hosting Hindutva speakers who give lectures and talks aimed at ‘preserving and explaining Hindu culture’ as a type of spiritual solution to Western modernity, as well as social events catered towards local Hindu communities (Zavos, 2010, 10; Mukta, 2000).
Thus, the creation of HSS UK and VHP UK was primarily an expression of long-distance nationalism as UK government policies of assimilation and integration did not encourage the inclusion of these organisations and the communities they represented into the definition of British national identity.

Shortly after the founding of VHP UK, a second wave of migration occurred with those coming from eastern and southern Africa in the early 1970s, particularly after the expulsion of Indians in Uganda in 1971. Termed ‘East African Asians’, who originated mostly from Gujarat but also Punjab, these migrants carried twice-migrant status (of having first migrated from India to Africa, and then from Africa to the UK). The same time period also witnessed the rise of multiculturalism as a new policy agenda in response to both education curricula addressing plurality, and legislation on ‘race relations’ in attempt to foster harmony under increasingly strict immigration controls. Multiculturalism policies also emerged following Conservative MP Enoch Powell’s infamous ‘Rivers of Blood Speech’ in 1968, which staunchly criticised mass immigration as an existential threat to (white) British culture and society (Hesse, 2000, 7). What distinguished multiculturalism from assimilation or integration was an overt effort to move away from simply tolerating cultural differences towards celebrating or valorising these markers. It simultaneously recognised a shift from the temporary status of migrant communities towards their settled permanence in the British landscape.

Multiculturalism persisted throughout the 1980s and 1990s, despite the anti-immigration rhetoric of the Thatcher years and the enduring racial social divisions (ibid., 8-9). A third wave of Indian migration in the 1990s occurred with the arrival of more international students in the UK. In response, the National Hindu Students Forum (NHSF) was established as an HSS project to recruit and retain university students with Hindutva ideology. The NHSF is an umbrella organisation that oversees Hindu society chapters founded in the early 1990s at British universities (including the London School of Economics, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of Birmingham, University of Cambridge, University of Oxford, etc.), which often have connections with affiliate organisations in India and other diaspora networks. NHSF societies host cultural events and high level, public conferences addressing campus issues, such as campaigns that highlight ‘religious persecution’ of Hindu students and ‘forced conversion’ of ‘vulnerable’ Hindu and Sikh female students by Muslim male students (Bhatt, 2000, 581-4; Zavos, 2010, 16-17). In short, NHSF constructs an exclusive Hindu identity, in which ‘the creation of boundaries, of difference are emphasized and may be the reason
that simply being a Hindu is stressed over the details of Hindu practice’ (Raj, 2000, 548). The creation of NHSF hence played into the domain of multiculturalism policy as it promotes a broad Hindu identity through culture, community, and belonging, but with ‘fixity and rigidity through a proscription and prescription of the boundaries of Hindu identity’ (ibid., 540).

Similarly, the Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP) UK was founded in 1992 with the aim of promoting the BJP’s mission and aims overseas. To date, academic scholarship on OFBJP UK has been almost non-existent, and this dissertation encourages more research on the organisation.

It was not until under the New Labour government in the late 1990s and early 2000s that multiculturalism policies began to generate major criticism by academics and researchers. Despite government efforts towards inclusion and community cohesion, a report published in 2000 by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, commonly known as the Parekh Report, was deeply critical in addressing the current state of British multiculturalism policies, particularly in regards to terminology:

Such terms as “minority” and “majority” signify fixed blocs and obscure the fluidity and heterogeneity of real life. The term “ethnic group” traps the group concerned into its ethnicity, and suppresses both its multiple identity and its freedom of self-determination. The term “integration” is even more misleading, as it implies a one-way process in which “minorities” are to be fully absorbed into the non-existent homogenous cultural structure of the “majority” (Report Introduction).

The Parekh Report recognised the problematic nature of these terms, whilst simultaneously drawing to light the insufficiency of creating new terms for use. Instead, it proposed a set of policy measures to target socio-economic inequalities, especially on racial discrimination and disadvantage, in order to create equal opportunities for all in British society.

Notwithstanding the inadequacies identified by the Commission, multiculturalism policies continued to be the prominent operating blueprint. However, race riots in the north of England in 2001 resulted in the government commissioning a ministerial group to identify the causes of the riots. The resulting report, known as the Cantle Report, describes ‘a depth of polarisation’ in which segregated communities experience ‘separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, [and] means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives’ in the UK (Cantle, 2001, 9). The explosive
findings of the Cantle Report became common parlance in the UK as a means to justify a more robust integration response from the government.

Further, the effects of 9/11 in 2001 and the 7/7 attacks in 2005 culminated in a new atmosphere of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam hostility in the UK. The New Labour government began to promote the necessity for British Muslims—euphemistically minority communities—to assimilate according to British values and traditions; this was reflected in the introduction of ‘a new nationality test, tightened immigration and asylum law, and… draconian anti-terrorism legislation. The security measures were linked explicitly to assimilative policies that problematically muddled together counterterrorism work with community relations, particularly in relation to Muslim groups’ (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2017, 6). Such policies continued under the Conservative government from 2010, and reached new heights when Prime Minister David Cameron declared the ‘state doctrine of multiculturalism’ a ‘failure’ and the need to exercise ‘muscular liberalism’ to counteract fears of rising ‘homegrown’ terrorism.

To date, multiculturalism is continuously interlinked with anti-(Islamist) extremism and immigration legislation, assuming that the ‘crisis’ of multiculturalism results from the combination of the latter two. It is done so often under the guise of promoting ‘British values’ against supposed ‘values’ of ethnic and religious minority communities. British Hindu organisations have successfully responded to multiculturalism initiatives by emphasising the distinct separation between Islam and Hinduism, reinforcing the trope that the former is instinctively violent, intolerant, and oppressive, whereas the latter is peaceful, tolerant, and compassionate. As such, British Hindu organisations describe ‘the taint of Muslimness’ by referring to Muslim communities in the UK as ‘problematic’ and frequent beneficiaries of ‘appeasement’ in contemporary British politics (Zavos, 2010, 12). By extension, then, British Hindus supposedly uphold the ‘British values’ of liberalism and inclusion as opposed to the intrinsically unassimilable traits of British Muslims.

The result is that multiculturalism today has become an ambiguous concept of what is Britishness, as it further problematises the extent to which race and ethnicity continuously serve as markers of difference. Consequently, the definition of a national identity is underpinned by who belongs within the imagined community. This notion of belonging is well complimented by the fact that British Hindus as a demographic have been generally successful, with representation in professional and managerial positions and top placements in universities. Average household income is also higher than
the national average (Dustmann & Theodoropoulos, 2010; Heath & Cheung, 2007; Office for National Statistics, 2019), and relative to other ethnic minorities, they are also more likely to support the Conservative Party (Martin, 2019; Martin & Khan, 2019). British Hindutva organisations still remain politically active in lobbying as ‘community’ representatives, receiving government funding to conduct community-wide activities (Mukta, 2000, 444) and often feature in UK government policies related to diversity, multiculturalism, and community cohesion in the name of religious and cultural plurality (Zavos, 2010, 18; Anderson, 2015).

In sum, the early stages of diaspora Hindutva organisations in the UK could be characterised as a form of long-distance nationalism, but its growth and expansion resulted from multiculturalism policies. British Hindutva is the outcome of a highly politicised agenda that is a reaction to the nexus of transnational and multicultural identity politics.

**American Hindutva**

It should be noted that the history of multiculturalism in the US manifests as radically different from that of the UK, both in terms of discourse and policy interventions. At the heart of American multiculturalism is the enduring issue of ‘race’ as a contested, and inadequately resolved, element of institutional and political representation. The myth of the US as a land of immigration and opportunity stands in bleak contrast to the history of systemic racism and structural inequalities, despite the ‘melting pot’ analogy characteristic of describing diversity. Following the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which saw constitutional and legal rights afforded to African Americans, including anti-discrimination and anti-segregation laws, the notion of a politics of recognition was gradually extended to other markers of social oppression such as gender and sexuality as popularised by the American counterculture movement. This new formation of identity politics in the US sought to address social injustices through a radical agenda of institutional transformation.

It was in the context of progressive social movements of the decade which witnessed the landmark Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which became the de facto legislation shaping American immigration policy to this day. It is historically significant for repealing national-origin quotas which had previously favoured western and northern European countries. Following the act’s implementation, skilled labour from outside of these regions was encouraged where previously
restricted. Consequently, the first wave of migrants from India occurred in the 1960s as a result of the act, mostly as professionals who quickly assimilated in American society based on their elite status. At this time, it was a rather small community of middle-class suburbanites, employed in universities or corporations to help fulfil the demand for STEM fields in a quickly escalating Cold War economy.

VHP America (VHPA) was founded in 1970 by these highly skilled migrants searching for a community. Its purpose remains today, like VHP UK, as a cultural organisation to reinforce Hindu culture and identity amongst the diaspora, with some of the same activities as its Indian counterpart (e.g. build temples, manage courses in Hindi and scriptures, and run festivals, summer schools, and youth camps) (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007, 283; Jaffrelot, 2007; Mathew, 2000). VHPA operates through multiple front organisations, some ephemeral for short-lived purposes and others with long-term functionality (Mathew, 2000, 112).

Yet, VHPA’s strongest support is not the first wave of elite migrants, but draws from the second wave of migrants in the 1970s, who constituted those employed as small business owners and often living in ghettoised neighbourhoods with little resources at their disposal. Many of these migrants came from Punjab and north India, where Hindutva has always retained a strong base from its conception. This new wave of a largely isolated and immobilised demographic became more susceptible to diaspora Hindutva as they searched for a common identity. Key to the expansion of VHPA’s network has been operating fundamentally at the family level (Rajagopal 2000, 473), promoting teachings of ‘Hindu values’ and culture. Its message is particularly salient in creating a moral compass away from the ‘Americanization’ of Hindu youth (Mathew & Prashad, 2000). The danger of its message, however, is a highly exclusionist definition of Hindu identity:

[During] the course of making cultural assumptions salient and creating a rationale for Hinduism, the VHP could inflect these assumptions with nationalist meanings, presenting the Hindu nation as the most advanced product of antiquity rather than as their own fabrication. At the same time, the VHP was active in social organizations, such as temple societies, language, regional and professional networks, as well as India Associations (Rajagopal, 2000, 474).

In response, VHPA does not take an overt political stance but portrays itself as a ‘cultural organization’ (Mathew & Prashad, 2000, 525) much like its British counterpart. Concurrently, this desire to maintain tradition by migrants also positioned it as vulnerable to a politicised agenda.
A third wave of migration in the 1980s and 1990s came mostly from those who either work in the IT sector and/or to study at universities. This was fostered by the passage of the Immigration Act of 1990, which increased the number of permanent work-based visas and changes to temporary skilled workers regulations. These new immigration policies favoured highly skilled and educated migrants. Here, the global economy based on the rise of information and communication technologies is interconnected with the livelihood of the Indian diaspora in the US with their employment in these industries, or pursuit of educational degrees in this field.

In 1989, HSS USA was established in the US. HSS USA serves as a space of belonging for new migrants grappling with new forms of socio-cultural mobility combined with traditional authoritarianism offered by Hindutva. HSS USA has experienced considerable growth since, due to three factors. First was the BJP taking office in 1996, which witnessed a spike in HSS USA membership. Secondly, the increase in Indian software engineers migrating to the US created a larger pool of interest, who also possessed the skills for digital outreach. And lastly, the entry of RSS activists (whom were also software engineers) led to greater membership recruitment. The growth of HSS USA reflects an emergence of new globalisation links, with corporate offices based simultaneously in small Indian towns, as well as in New York or San Jose (Rajagopal, 2000, 480-2).

In response to the emergence of new migrant students, VHPA created the Hindu Students Council (HSC) in the 1990s, with the first chapter in 1987 at Northeastern University in Boston, and has rapidly grown to more than seventy-five chapters across American university campuses. Essentially the public face of VHPA, HSC is a student-run organisation with significant VHPA oversight. Although initially headed by male migrant graduate students with Hindutva ties to India, it has increasingly come under leadership of second-generation students with family connections to VHPA. Each chapter is hierarchically structured with a team of local officers reporting to the regional and subsequently, national, leadership (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007, 283; Mathew & Prashad, 2000, 527; Mathew, 2000, 112).

During this time in the 1980s and 1990s, multiculturalism as an intellectual phenomenon rose to prominence with the ‘culture wars’ at universities, which brought to light differences in ‘race’ and ethnicity, as well as gender, sexuality, and class (Hesse, 2000, 13) through debates on intersectionality as interlaced with discussions of power, privilege, and knowledge. American Hindutva organisations
such as HSC, were quick to respond to university spaces viewed as the stronghold of multiculturalism, in which ethnic and religious difference is celebrated. Like its parent organisation, the HSC plays to the cultural difference experienced by young Hindus:

HSCs have made use of the institutional policy of multiculturalism to attract young Indian-Americans who often know little about the political situation in India, but who wish to attach themselves to a cultural imaginary of India as a great civilization. This desire is in large part facilitated by multiculturalism since within this discourse each minority ethnic and racial group is expected to present its own unique cultural repertoire (Kamat & Mathew, 2003, 13).

The history of India that is taught to HSC members is highly politicised with Hindutva readings. Yet, HSC legitimises its external outreach with activities such as ethnic food festivals and film screenings, in which participants can consume ‘Indian’ (i.e. Hindu) culture (Mathew, 2000, 120). Like its British counterpart NHSF, HSC came to co-opt the emancipative rhetoric of multiculturalism under the guise of exclusionary elements of Hindutva ideology.

Further, in an effort to strategically employ the internet as a means of communication to connect the diaspora (and capitalise on their skills), HSC launched the Global Hindu Electronic Network in 1996, connected to the Hindu Universe platform run by the RSS (Therwath, 2012, 555; Rajagopal, 2000, 476; Mathew, 2000; Mathew & Prasad, 2000, 526). As a primary communicative tool for a vast and dispersed demographic, the network has helped contribute towards an expansive online Hindutva presence. Thus, the growth of American Hindutva depended on cyber connections to reach a geographically scattered diaspora, providing an opportunity to disseminate propaganda on online platforms.

Lastly, the Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP) USA was founded in 1991 at the request of the BJP shortly before that year’s national election (Anderson & Clibbens, 2018, 1758). OFBJP USA frequently hosts visiting Indian political figures and continues to provide support during elections, such as distributing the BJP party manifesto and raising funds online during the 1996 election (Mathew, 2000, 113). The same election year, the BJP’s manifesto declared NRIs [Non-Resident Indians] a high priority given their capacity to invest and provide capital in India (Rajagopal, 2000, 490). Indeed, this support was reinforced when the OFBJP USA released a statement in 1998 in favour of nuclear tests to be conducted by the BJP government as a national security measure against Pakistan (ibid., 486). This dissertation encourages further research to analyse the role of OFBJP USA during Modi’s 2014 and 2019 election campaigns.
Until 2001, American Hindutva organisations focused on portraying themselves as religious groups in order present ‘Hinduism to the American public in such a way that it fit with Western norms’, yet this changed with 9/11 as fear of Islam became expressed in national security terms (Kurien, 2006, 731; 2016). The activities of American Hindutva organisations shifted in order to emphasise the distinction between Islam and Hinduism, much like their British counterparts. Given anti-Muslim sentiment within diaspora Hindutva, long-distance nationalism with India became featured more prominently in the form of US-India foreign relations, particularly with concerns of Islamist terrorism (from Pakistan), in the post-9/11 period.

The discourse of multiculturalism in the US, which favours the notion of a ‘melting pot’, reflects the American ethos as a land of immigration and opportunity. This has suited the image of American Hindus, a demographic which today constitutes one of the highest household incomes and are employed as highly educated, highly skilled individuals in professional settings (Pew, 2014). This furthers their ‘model minority’ stereotype in the American parlance of diversity (see Balan & Mahalingam, 2015; Saran, 2015). Originally coined in reference to the socioeconomic success of Japanese Americans, the ‘model minority’ term has been extended to American Jews and Asian Americans (especially East Asians and Indians) as a means of signifying high educational attainment and income of a demographic. Coupled with this are low rates of criminality and high family/marital stability. Accordingly, ‘model minorities’ are praised as having integrated within American society, with Indian Americans in particular upheld as exemplars of the American Dream.

Despite the advantages that diaspora Hindutva has enjoyed as a result of multiculturalism policies, namely, maintaining the status of ‘integration’ in the UK and success as a ‘model minority’ in the US, Western radical right agendas describe multiculturalism as a failure. Here, the reinforcement of the narrative that Islam and Muslims are culturally incompatible within the values of Western societies takes precedence in their critique of multiculturalism. For the radical right there is a fundamental ‘real conflict between national identity and multiculturalism’ (Rydgren, 2007, 246) based on the critique of multiculturalism as allegedly promoting Islamist extremism. This dissertation finds that Indian diaspora alliances with radical right agendas form out of a shared anxiety with Islam as a threat to national identity, despite having profited from multiculturalism policies. The following section explores in turn how Leave campaigners during the Brexit referendum and Trump’s presidential
campaign exercised overt appeals to potential Indian diaspora voters by expressing radical right ideas which converge with Hindutva narratives.

**Brexit and Trump in 2016**

With exception, few studies to date have acknowledged contemporary Indian diaspora connections to Western radical right groups, movements, or parties (see Singh, 2017; Anderson, 2015, 54; Roopram & van Steenbergen, 2014; Lane, 2012), let alone ethnic minority and/or immigrant supporters (see Mulinari & Neergaard, 2019; Pettersson et. al, 2016). The Brexit referendum and Trump’s election in 2016 provided an opportunity for the ideological convergence of diaspora Hindutva and the radical right agendas of these phenomena. In particular, these campaigns promoted Islamophobic tropes and myths, as well as issues of immigration, which resonated with the concerns of diaspora Hindutva organisations. Although the articles of this dissertation expand on this convergence in-depth, the following briefly compares how the Brexit and Trump campaigns promoted these salient ideas.

**Brexit referendum**

In the UK, the Leave campaign emphasised the legacy of Commonwealth during the Brexit referendum in order to appeal to British Indians. By reinforcing the historical connections of the UK to its former colonies, the campaign stressed preference for Britain’s ‘special relationship’ with the Commonwealth over that of the EU. Commonwealth migration thus took precedence over EU migration facilitated by the EU’s freedom of movement clause (see Namusoke, 2016; Bhambra, 2017). In other words, the Leave campaign’s slogan of ‘take back control’ of the borders was an invocation not only of the reawakened nostalgia for empire, but a reclaiming of the national imagined community, one in which British Indians rightfully belong.

Anxiety over territorial boundaries, however, extends beyond EU migration, and includes the image of the Muslim ‘other’ as encapsulated by the European refugee crisis beginning in 2015 as a result of the Syrian civil war and rise of Islamic State. The crisis, when combined with Islamist extremist motivated attacks in Paris and Brussels in 2015, ignited fears of the refugee as a potential Islamist terrorist. Thus, prominent Leave figures such as Nigel Farage called for an end to ‘uncontrolled’
borders of the EU, which was manifested when he posed in front of the infamous ‘Breaking Point’ poster depicting a mass number of male Middle Eastern refugees allegedly entering Europe’s borders as a result of the EU’s failure on immigration (see Virdee & McGeever, 2018). The notion that Muslim migrants would take advantage of the current immigration system, and subsequently pose a security risk to British society, suited the Islamophobic narratives prevalent within British Hindutva as not only the need to securitise borders, but a threat to community cohesion.

**Trump campaign**

In the US, Donald Trump’s campaign appealed to Indian Americans through a collaborative effort with an advocacy organisation called the Republican Hindu Coalition (RHC). According to the RHC’s mission statement:

> Republican Hindu Coalition shall provide a single unified platform to build a strong, effective & respected Hindu-American voice in Washington and across the country. RHC shall become a unique bridge between the Hindu-American community and Republican Party Leaders. It shall promote the social, economic, political, cultural, religious, and spiritual interests of Hindus. We shall make the best and relentless efforts to make the 21st Century to be an Indo-American Century through an exponential increase in bilateral trade between India and the US and a strategic alliance between the two countries at all levels (RHC website, 2019).

The RHC echoes earlier efforts of American Hindutva organisations to represent and mobilise the US-based diaspora, albeit with a foreign policy focus on US-India relations. In addition, the RHC considers Hindus to ‘include all faiths like Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists’ (*ibid.*), a controversial position which is echoed by Hindutva ideologies in India who view these religions as sects of Hinduism in order to include them as part of the Hindu fold to achieve a *rashtra*. Islam and Christianity, on the other hand, are seen as ‘foreign’ influences based on monotheistic principles. Thus, the RHC essentialises Hindu identity in order to represent myriad interests of religious communities into a universal platform.

During the election campaign, Trump spoke at a public rally hosted by the RHC, in particular emphasising India’s role in fighting ‘radical Islamic terrorism’ and promising a stronger alliance between India and the US in ‘defeating’ this global threat. Trump also relayed his admiration of Modi as a strongman in this venture. By weaving the narrative of Islamist extremism as a national security threat to both the US and India, Trump promoted a radical right agenda in congruence with American Hindutva aims. Further, Trump described Hindu Americans in terms of their hard work and enterprise,
thus reinforcing the model minority stereotype of Indian Americans as ‘good immigrants’ who are well-integrated in the US. By extension, illegal immigrants and Muslims are viewed as undermining the fabric of American society.

Despite rhetorical differences, both the Brexit and Trump campaigns offered an opportunity for diaspora Hindutva to converge with radical right platforms. Specifically, issues of immigration and Islamist extremism became rallying points to mobilise Indian diaspora supporters. The result is an ideological hybridity, which combines exclusionary elements of these movements into a global discourse. Importantly, what this phenomenon reflects is the enduring role of nationalism to cement the image of who belongs within these imagined communities. The following chapter hence discusses nationalism as the foundational theoretical framework of this dissertation.
3 Theoretical Framework

Previous theoretical insights into diaspora Hindutva are predominantly oriented on long-distance nationalism (Thobani, 2019; Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007; Mathew, 2000), or the nexus between long-distance nationalism and multiculturalism (Anderson, 2015; Zavos, 2010, 2008; Kamat & Mathew, 2003; Mukta, 2000; Rajagopal, 2000; Mathew & Prashad, 2000; Raj, 2000), the latter of which has been elaborated upon above. Such discussions concerning ‘transnational communities’ (Portes, 2000) illuminate the global flows of ideas that are adapted towards local contexts. However, there is lack of theorisation when it comes to Hindutva as an ideology beyond the remit of esotericism, and relatedly with diaspora Hindutva. This gap becomes especially problematic when connecting the ideological currents of Hindutva to the Western radical right.

This dissertation hence encompasses a theoretical framework which combines scholarship from nationalism studies with conceptual overlaps from diaspora and radical right literature. In lieu of drawing upon all within these vast bodies of literature, this dissertation focuses upon specific approaches within these sub-fields, namely, the role of nationalism within and between them in order to contextualise their relevance for the topic of study. This chapter begins by providing an overview of ethnic, or ethno-, nationalism, as it applies towards Hindutva. It draws upon the interchange between colonial administration and the categorisation of ‘ethnicity’ as a tool of colonial rule; in turn, colonial subjects came to embody these categories of governmentality. By extension, it explores ‘ethnicity’, ‘groupism’, and ‘identity’ as analytical categories in relation to ethno-nationalism.

It then theorises Hindutva as an ethno-nationalist ideology that travelled and adapted to diasporic formulations. In turn, the emergence of diaspora Hindutva is not only an expression of long-distance nationalist ties, but also a reconfiguration of narratives of belonging in nationalist imaginaries. Through the process of cementing these narratives, this dissertation argues that diaspora Hindutva has come to adopt articulations of civic nationalist frames, which are still exclusionary in nature. It is from this basis which offers an opportunity for those in the Indian diaspora to merge with Western radical right platforms, which have also shifted from ethno-nationalist towards civic nationalist frames. Here, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion do not necessarily have to be ethnic or racial, but can instead be determined on the basis of culture. This dissertation thus offers the terminology of exclusionary nationalism, which argues that the Western radical right’s employment of civic nationalism as framed
on the premise of culture is inherently exclusionary but still open to possible adherents. It argues that the exclusionary nationalism promoted both by the radical right and diaspora Hindutva manifests as complementary nationalist imaginaries.

Nationalism

Nationalism, when broadly considered, is conceived by scholars in its various permutations according to two distinct types: ethnic (or ethno-) nationalism or civic nationalism. Civic nationalism, briefly, refers to the idea that nation-states are characterised by ‘institutions, customs, historical memories and rational secular values. Anyone can join the nation irrespective of birth or ethnic origins… There is no myth of common ancestry… [Nationhood is] based on territorially defined community, not upon a social boundary among groups within a territory’ (Keating in Brubaker, 1999, 61-2). This is not to deny the analytical ambiguity of civic nationalism, which certainly contains elements of exclusion. However, the basis of commonality in civic nationalism in reference to inclusive ‘common values’ and ‘common identity’ as surpassing genealogy stands in stark contrast to ethnic nationalism. This chapter will once again turn to a discussion of civic nationalism further below.

Ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, arises from the notion that ethnic communities constitute the basis for nations. Smith (1986) describes six dimensions foundational to ethnic community: ‘a collective name’, ‘a common myth of descent’, ‘a shared history’, ‘a distinctive shared culture’, ‘an association with a specific territory’, and ‘a sense of solidarity’ (22-30). Together, these dimensions ascribe ethnicity, or ethnie. Smith contends that ‘collectivities in the process of “ethnic formation” will generally seek to augment their shared characteristics and differences along those of the six dimensions’ (31), often consolidated at different historical junctures. With the formation of nations in the modern era brought forth the ambiguous and tense relations between nation-states and ethnie. As the nation-state came to exercise power within consolidated boundaries, pre-existing ethnie was transformed into the main unit for ‘mobilization, territorialisation and politicization’ (Smith, 1986, 137). The effect today is an ethno-nationalism that privileges supposed ‘organic’ genealogy, language, religion, customs, and cultural homogeneity.
The ideas of ethno-nationalism emerged in resistance and separatist movements against colonial regimes in the 19th and 20th centuries, in which local intelligentsia and elites sought to create and cement ethnie as the basis for newly independent post-colonial nations (see Smith, 1991, 106-10). Such instances of mobilisation ‘often produced mythological accounts of their pre-colonial roots, of the heroism of anti-colonial founders, or of the commonalities of their citizens. Not surprisingly, they played down the extent to which their borders and populations were defined arbitrarily by conflicts and compromises between colonial powers’ (Calhoun, 1997, 33). In the period leading up to and during India’s independence, for instance, Hindutva ideologues identified with and reclaimed Hindu-ness as the ‘authentic’ and ‘natural’ expression of territorial boundaries, despite the fact that as an ideology it was influenced by European scholars on ethno-nationalism (Bhatt, 2001), or what Jaffrelot describes as ‘the invention of an ethnic nationalism’ (2007, 3). As Chatterjee points out, there is little distinction between the colonial state and the (European defined) modern nation-state, with the former as a global extension of the latter (1994, 14).

Indeed, British colonialism had introduced a system of codifying India’s vast and diverse population into ethnic and religious categories in order to effectively govern through divide and rule. The result was a massive bureaucratisation of the colonial administration which segmented newly framed ethnic and religious categories upon colonial subjects who had previously not identified with these markers: ‘to the extent this complex of power and knowledge was colonial, the forms of objectification and normalization of the colonized had to reproduce, within the framework of a universal knowledge, the truth of the colonial difference…race was perhaps the most obvious mark of colonial difference’ (Chatterjee, 1994, 20). By developing and enacting a system of categorisation, the British colonial state determined how biological attributes such as ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’ designate specific configurations of identification that can be codified and sustained over time. These categories do not simply translate as a top-down direction, but simultaneously came to be embodied by the subjects of colonialism to comprise meaning relative to other categories [see Franz Fanon’s influential Black Skin, White Masks (2008/1952) for more on the psychological effects of colonial domination]. As Brubaker effectively summarises:

From above, we can focus on the ways in which categories are proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched, and generally embedded in multifarious forms of “governmentality.” From below, we can study the “micropolitics” of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade, or transform the categories that are imposed on them… (2004, 13).
Here, we consider what Brubaker alludes to as the role of the state in a Foucauldian sense, as implementing categories with the aim to exercise (bio-political) power in governance. In other words, *ethnie* became a tool of the colonial apparatus that was eventually internalised and embodied by subjects. By extension, the categorised—i.e. colonial subjects—can respond as complicit, resistant, apathetic, or a combination thereof, but nearly always recognise the category of *ethnie* as pertaining social value.

The Partition of the subcontinent in 1947 cemented the nationalist imaginaries of India as a Hindu nation and Pakistan (and later Bangladesh) as a Muslim nation. As Chatterjee elaborates, ‘[t]he national past had been constructed by…intelligentsia as a “Hindu” past, regardless of the fact that the appellation itself was of recent vintage and that the revivalism chose to define itself by a name given to it by “others.” The history of the nation could accommodate Islam only as a foreign element…’ (Chatterjee, 1994, 73-4). Islam was constructed by *Hindutva* proponents to be distinctively foreign, if only to serve as a pillar of difference for which to define an ‘Other’ within the newly fashioned nation-state. With this transfer of power also instilled the legacy of colonial rule—even now during the contemporary period—of ‘groupism’, what Brubaker describes as ‘the tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis…as if they were internally homogenous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes’ (2004, 8). It is precisely this form of groupism that was, and still is, invoked by *Hindutva* actors, for whom being a Hindu constitutes a primordial and static identity. This is projected at the national level, for which geo-political aspirations are encapsulated by the *Hindutva* concept of *Akhand Bharat*, in which the modern territories of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are once again united under the Hindu *rashtra*.

The project of revisionist history enacted by *Hindutva* ideologues is thus not only a rewriting of history previously documented by foreign rulers, but the creation of a nationalist consciousness. To quote Chatterjee (1994) at length:

The idea that “Indian nationalism” is synonymous with “Hindu nationalism” is not the vestige of some premodern religious conception. It is an entirely modern, rationalist, and historicist idea. Like other modern ideologies, it allows for a central role of the state in the modernization of society and strongly defends the state’s unity and sovereignty…What, we may ask, is the place of those inhabitants of India who are excluded from this nation? There are several answers suggested in this historiography. One, which assumes the centrality of the modern state in the life of the nation, is frankly majoritarian. The majority “community” is Hindu; the others are minorities. State policy must therefore reflect this preponderance, and the minorities
must accept the leadership and protection of the majority. This view, which today is being propagated with such vehemence in postcolonial India by Hindu-extremist politics, actually originated more than a hundred years ago, at the same time Indian nationalism was born (110).

In short, *Hindutva* ideologues’ idea of an Indian nation is ironically deeply intertwined with the continuity of the colonial project, which imparted categories of difference in order to govern according to the principle of divide and rule. In nation-building efforts, *Hindutva* actors seek to reclaim a past in order to advance the future progress of a nation, but in doing so, rely upon the legacy of colonialism in constructing a national identity.

According to Brubaker, ‘identity’ can be conceptualised in multiple ways of which three are highlighted: 1) ‘as a specifically collective phenomenon, “identity” denotes a fundamental and consequential “sameness” among members of a group or a category’; or, 2) ‘as a core aspect of (individual or collective) self-hood or as a fundamental condition of social being, “identity” is invoked to point to something allegedly deep, basic, abiding, or foundational’ (2004, 34). There is very clearly a connection between these first two criteria of identity in how Hindu-ness has been understood by *Hindutva* ideologues as a collective and foundational aspect of being Hindu.

Yet, Brubaker also describes how identity can be 3) ‘invoked to highlight the unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary self’ (2004, 35). By situating identity as a process of identification that can be relational and categorical, the former arises from organic dynamics of interaction vis-à-vis others whereas the latter is imposed according to categorical attributes, as described above (ibid., 41-2). In other words, identity can be understood as depending on mutual recognition, interaction, and collective solidarity, rather than as a static, inflexible frame of reference determined by ethno-national actors. In considering this third criteria of identity, the contextual and situational aspect of ethnicity necessitates rethinking how ‘[e]thnicity, race, and nation should be conceptualized… in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms… And it means taking as a basic analytical category not the “group” as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable’ (Brubaker, 2004, 11). The notion that ethnicity, groupism, and the nation-state are inherently fluid markers transitions to the next section on the formation of diasporas.
Nationalism and Diaspora: boundary making

Diasporas are by nature fluid and cross-territorial, often in a state of liminality. At the same time, diasporas are characterised by nationalist attachments. This dissertation defines diaspora according to Brubaker, as a noun ‘designating a collectivity’ and consequently diasporic as ‘an attribute or modality—as in diasporic citizenship, diasporic consciousness, diasporic identity, diasporic imagination, diasporic nationalism, diasporic networks, diasporic culture, diasporic religion, or even the diasporic self’ (2005, 4). Like ‘ethnicity’, ‘groupism’, and ‘identity’, diaspora entails a significant degree of attributing the collective as the primary means of configuration. This sense of collectivity figures within three elements constituting the criteria for a diaspora: dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary-maintenance (ibid., 5-7).

Dispersion, whether forced or voluntary, implies dispersion across state borders. Consequently, contemporary diasporas cannot conceptually exist without the boundaries of nation-states to demarcate the flows of bodies. However, dispersion is a relatively general term used to describe most forms of mobility and migration (see Tölöyan, 2012), and as such, should only be considered a basic criterion for diaspora formation.

The second element, homeland orientation, refers to the notion of a real or imagined homeland in which the diaspora plays a role in constructing myths and collective memory. In contemporary terms, the nation-state serves as the locus for the homeland, as ‘the primary conceptual “other” against which diaspora is defined’ (Brubaker, 2005, 10). Identification with the homeland in the form of a nation-state is accordingly described as diaspora nationalism (Gellner, 1983, 101) or long-distance nationalism (Anderson, 1998). Both of these abstractions have become foundational in understanding the practices of diaspora political participation and mobilisation towards the homeland, let alone what Vertovec identifies as a type of consciousness, marked by ‘awareness of multi-locality’, as well as a mode of cultural production ‘involving the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena’ (2000, 141-60).

In these conceptualisations, however, there is a risk of essentialising “the” nation-state, a risk of attributing to it a timeless, self-actualizing, homogenising “logic”… Discussions of diaspora are often informed by a strikingly idealist, teleological understanding of the nation-state, which is seen as the
unfolding of an idea, the idea of nationalizing and homogenising the population’ (Brubaker, 2005, 10). As such, there is a strong link between diasporas and ethno-nationalism, given that the homeland is imagined as ancestral, ‘authentic’, and tied to the notion of ethnie. The view of the nation as a static, essentialist entity which shapes the diasporic psyche provides a shared sense of belonging to an otherwise dispersed population, but can also problematise how the diaspora chooses to recognise itself outside this territoriality.

In response to what Alexander (2017) highlights as ‘a broader question [of] not only about what diaspora is, but why it matters: about the difference that diaspora as a concept makes, and how this marks it out as distinct from the other theorizations of migration and mobility’ (1550), is the third criterion of a diaspora—boundary making and boundary maintenance. As opposed to migrants, who ‘themselves maintain boundaries is only to be expected’ (Brubaker, 2005, 7), the boundaries maintained by second, third, and successive generations of the diaspora brings forth a rich conceptualisation of what, why, and how such boundaries prevail over time. This results in characterising their groupism as an entity. Understanding how these boundaries are created and maintained by diasporas is a central focus of this dissertation, which traces the process of Indian migration to diaspora formation.

Building upon the discussion of ethnie and nationalism in the previous section, Barth argues that at the most essential level, ethnic boundary maintenance is possible not only due to recognition and identification amongst members of an ethnic group, but also when such interactions are marked by the persistence of cultural differences (1998/1969, 16). These cultural differences are presumed to be foundational towards the reproduction of boundaries. When it comes to diasporic experiences, however, Brah offers a more fruitful analysis in describing the intersection between diaspora, ethnicity, and boundary maintenance:

An ethnic group is best defined not by its cultural characteristics but by reference to the process of boundary formation. Ethnic boundaries may be constructed and maintained around a range of signifiers articulating in varying combinations under specific situations… In other words, ethnicity is primarily a mechanism of boundary maintenance between groups… Ethnicity is understood as relational and it is construed in terms of a process (1996, 163).

2 There is a rich body of literature dedicated towards processes of social and symbolic boundary making; for more see Pachucki et. al (2007). This discussion omits from providing a broad overview and instead focuses on the nexus between ethnicity, diaspora, and boundary making.
Rather than defining ethnicity as a primordial, top-down categorisation, Brah challenges us to understand ethnicity as a mutually reinforcing process embodied by diasporas through boundary formation. Like Brubaker, Brah stresses the relational component as significant for situating ethnicity not as an objective criterion, but a continuous negotiation of distinctiveness between and across groups.

In order to consider ethnicity beyond the categorical dimension and instead recognise the constant processes of relationality, Brah argues for the need to explore historical and sociological trajectories of the diasporic experience as modulated by power structures:

> the concept of diaspora concerns the historically variable forms of relationality within and between diasporic formations... [it] centres on the configurations of power which differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another... it is the economic, political and cultural specificities linking these components that the concept of diaspora signifies... via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory (1996, 183).

When situating the Hindu diasporas in the UK and US, such migratory patterns existed in conjunction with the shifting global political economy: from indentured labour in the Caribbean and eastern and southern Africa under the British empire, to the demand for labour migrants in order to reconstruct post-Second World War economies, to twice-migrants forcibly dispersed from south-eastern Africa to the UK as a result of ‘Africanization’ policies, to highly skilled migrants fulfilling America’s demand in the STEM fields during the Cold War, and lastly, to the ‘IT generation’ which helped build Silicon Valley and the high-tech era. Each wave of migration reflects a diversity in class, caste, language, and regional affiliation. Consequently, the scale and speed of globalisation impacts our understanding of the ‘forms of relationality within and between’ these communities.

What unites these otherwise disparate diasporas is a commitment to ‘a confluence of narratives’ essential towards transnational myth making and identity formation of a singular diaspora. In other words, despite the differences which would be considered relevant ‘back home’, their lived experiences in the West are characterised by a collective process of identification, a shared involvement in defining who we are and where we belong in the nationalist imaginary. As such, ethnicity subsumes a role in boundary making in so far as it relates to the process of constructing groupism dynamics within the diaspora.
The danger of this narrative is a tendency to essentialise differences into a universal identity, which ultimately becomes vulnerable to Hindutva dogma. Brah warns of this potential slippage: ‘It is clear that ethnic groups do not constitute a category of primordial ties. But does this not mean that, under particular political circumstances, they cannot come to be represented in such terms… political mobilisation of ethnicity in nationalist or racist discourses may serve to conceal precisely such social divisions (1996, 164). It is the ethno-nationalist articulations invoked by diaspora Hindutva ideologues which cement the notion of Hindu-ness in primordial terms.

When considering how multiculturalism policies (as outlined in the background chapter) have benefited diaspora Hindutva organisations, particularly in areas such as community cohesion and integration, we can posit how ethno-political entrepreneurs in the diaspora are redefining groupness through boundary maintenance practices. These actors, who ‘live “off” as well as “for” ethnicity—often have what Pierre Bourdieu has called a performative character. By invoking groups, they seek to evoke them, summon them, call them into being’ (Brubaker, 2004, 10). By exploiting categories of ethnic, racial, and religious pluralism to position their claims as ‘politics of recognition’, this results in ‘valorizing particular cultural attachments and identities—including ethnic or ethnocultural ones—and by seeing the public recognition of such particularistic attachments as central to and supportive of rather than antithetical to citizenship’ (ibid., 144). They ultimately participate in essentialising dynamics of who is represented in this community. Consequently, multiculturalism policies have the unintended effect of categorising ethnicity, race, and religion as primordial and static groupness exploited by ethno-political entrepreneurs.

The link between ethno-political entrepreneurs and multiculturalism thus explains the partial success of diaspora Hindutva, which takes shape not just as a form of long-distance nationalism, but in promoting boundary maintenance within the UK and US. By virtue of defining parameters of inclusion and exclusion in boundary maintenance work, diaspora Hindutva ethno-political entrepreneurs help construct narratives of belonging in the nationalist imaginary. This creates an opportunity for diaspora Hindutva actors to align with the Western radical right, which is explored in the following section.
Nationalism and the Radical Right: a ‘master concept’

The vast literature on the radical right\(^3\) frequently alludes to the role of nationalism as a significant component in ideology, yet very few scholars directly address or specify what nationalism entails nor critically interrogate definitions of nationalism. This is not to discredit the useful scholarly interventions in the development of radical right, extreme right, or far right literature, but rather situates how such contributions can be understood within a broader framework of nationalism. One scholar who does explicitly focus on nationalism is Rydgren (2007), who describes how the radical right shares ‘an emphasis on ethno-nationalism rooted in myths about the distant past. Their program is directed toward strengthening the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous and by returning it to traditional values’ (242). As such, the guiding assumption is that immigration and multiculturalism is antithetical to ethno-nationalist underpinnings of the radical right. Bar-On (2018) similarly discusses the relationship between the radical right and nationalism, in which the latter serves as the ‘master concept’ for the former’s ideological proclivities. For Bar-On, ethno-nationalism is the foundation for the radical right: ‘the national borders and the state should be equivalent with the dominant ethnic group; that national preference should be promoted; the homogenous nation is idealized; that ethnocracies are longed for; and that “enemy Others” constantly threaten to tear the nation asunder and hence should be removed from the body politic’ (26). Accordingly, the radical right is driven by the notion that sovereignty is tied to nativist underpinnings. Consequently, ‘immigrants and in particular Muslim immigrants are seen as the primary threats to the “health” of the nation’ (28), or rather, a biological invasion to the purity of the organic ethnos.

On the other hand, Halikiopoulou, Mock, & Vasilopoulou (2012) argue that the success of the contemporary radical right stems from a rhetorical shift from ethno-nationalism to civic nationalism:

\[
\text{How does a party or movement pushing what amounts to an ethnic exclusivist agenda annex the values of tolerance, liberalism and diversity in the interests of mobilising a nation? The answer: by identifying these values as the unique patrimony of the nation, threatened by an influx of outsiders who do not share and are unable or unwilling to adopt them. In other words: “our” nation is one of tolerance, liberalism and diversity and that tradition is threatened by an influx of intolerant, reactionary and narrow-minded “others” } \quad (109).
\]

\(^3\) The radical right, as opposed to the extreme right, seeks to effect change by democratic, non-violent means, but often with the aim to achieve an exclusionary nationalist society (whether ethno or cultural).
By adopting civic variants of nationalism, the radical right promotes ‘our’ way of life under the guise of cultural ‘values’ in order to promote its position as a guardian of national identity. This discursive shift can be partly attributed to reformed tactics and strategies of the radical right in order to legitimise an exclusionary message for mainstream appeal (see Akkerman, de Lange, & Rooduijn, 2016, 1-27; Mudde, 2007, 2004). This could also be viewed according to what Barker (1981) terms as cultural racism, which has surpassed biological racism of the past. Here, cultural differences are assumed to be fundamentally incompatible with the dominant culture, as opposed to overt biological differences.

Yet, as Brubaker (2004) highlights, both ethnic and civic nationalism are ‘simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. What varies is not the fact or even the degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness, but the bases or criteria of inclusion and exclusion’ (141). For the former, it is based on common ethnicity with ‘an emphasis on descent’ or ‘ethno-cultural’ (136-7); for the latter, it is based on citizenship which ‘by its very nature, is an exclusive as well as an inclusive status’ or by ‘political creed’ (141-2). By extension, civic nationalism is not inherently more inclusive but rather a different form of inclusivity.

On this basis, this dissertation argues that a consequence of the radical right’s tactical shift towards civic nationalist rhetoric enables the opportunity for ethnic minority and/or immigrant supporters to support radical right agendas. Here, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion do not necessarily have to be ethnic or racial in nature, but can instead co-opt the civic variants of cultural ‘values’ as described by Halikiopoulou et. al. This is not to overemphasise the number of ethnic minority supporters (which remains marginal), nor does it exclude the possibility of minorities supporting exclusion of other minorities.4 But it instead questions why and how a ‘minority within a minority’ would sympathise with Western radical right ideology that is fundamentally exclusionary against minorities. At a superficial level, this could be interpreted as supporting or voting against their interests; whilst at a deeper level, this could signify a socio-psychological fear of ethnic and/or religious misidentification and the consequent desire to maintain status in the hierarchy of national belonging. Both rationale, however, are insufficient towards addressing the overt, and at times, enthusiastic support for exclusionary nationalist agendas as articulated by ethnic minorities.

4 As explored in the third article.
In the case of this dissertation, there is a shift from the ethno-nationalist expressions of *Hindutva* towards the civic nationalism articulated by diaspora *Hindutva* actors and organisations. By positioning themselves according to civic nationalist rhetoric based on liberal values of tolerance and respect for difference, as opposed to other ethnic and religious communities (i.e. Muslims) who allegedly do not support these values (see Zavos 2010; Kurien 2006), diaspora *Hindutva* shares this linguistic attribute with the Western radical right, which provides common ground between these movements. As Simonsen & Bonikowski (2019) highlight, conceptions of civic nationalism can correlate strongly with anti-Muslim, and not just anti-immigrant, attitudes. This is further reinforced, Anderson (2015, 53) notes, by the fact that the Indian diaspora in the UK and US are viewed as well-integrated and a model minority, which obfuscates an exclusionary agenda perpetuated under the guise of liberal democratic vocabulary. As such, employing the umbrella term of exclusionary nationalism throughout this dissertation is a more fruitful undertaking as it recognises that degrees of exclusivity do not have to be primarily ethno oriented in nature, nor do principles of civic nationalism guarantee inclusivity.

This dissertation attempts to theorise the interplay between (diaspora) *Hindutva* and Western radical right agendas by positing the notion of *complementary*, rather than competing, nationalisms. The Brexit and Trump campaigns echoed narratives prevalent in *Hindutva*, not only with anti-Muslim and Islamophobic tropes, but importantly, anxiety with protecting the boundaries of the nation. Here again, the notion of *Akhand Bharat* parallels the fear of uncontrolled borders promoted by the Brexit and Trump agendas. In other words, the geographies of India, the UK, and US ‘…are made symbolically synonymous, metaphorically mapped onto one another via concerns to secure their (different) territorial boundaries’ which ‘reveals the productive synergy that exists between distinct nationalist projects in the transnational present’ (Thobani, 2019, 13, 3). By understanding how the diaspora acts as a mediator between these ‘distinct nationalist projects’, we can situate their role in perpetuating exclusionary nationalist imaginaries in their countries of settlement/residence.
4 Research Design and Methods

In order to unpack how those in the Indian diaspora bridge and merge the ideological currents of Hindutva and the radical right, this dissertation employs a mixed methodological approach which situates the multi-layered ways in which ideology operates. It explores this through four methods.

The first method, genealogy, utilises secondary sources in order to trace the historical lineage of Hindutva as an ideology. Its aim is theory building, and serves as a conceptual foundation in the first article which is operationalised in the subsequent four articles.

The second method, qualitative content analysis on social media, is based on a sample of thirty-nine pro-Brexit and pro-Trump Indian diaspora Twitter accounts that total 185,580 tweets, retweets, replies, and mentions. Data collection was conducted between April 2017 and April 2018. As the second, third, and fourth articles of the dissertation utilise this data, it is given the most attention below.

The third method, quantitative social media analysis, builds on the sample of thirty-nine Twitter accounts and applies quantitative metrics in order to map at a macro scale the network of these users. This method is utilised primarily in the fourth article.

The fourth and last method, semi-structured interviews, results in thirteen interviews with Indian diaspora Brexit and Trump supporters. Data was collected between January and October 2018. Nearly half of the interviewees were recruited from the Twitter accounts. This overlap was intentional, built on the aim to interview Twitter users. These interviews are presented in the fifth article.

Genealogy

The first article of the dissertation provides a genealogy that compares two vast bodies of academic literature, namely Hindutva in South Asian studies and right-wing extremism in the West. It attempts to answer the first sub-research question: ‘How does Hindutva fit within Western definitions of the radical right? Can such definitions be considered universal?’
Genealogy here refers to the approach developed by Michel Foucault, which traces the history of an idea based on the origins and context defining a specific period as interlaced with ‘modalities of knowledge, power, thought, epistemologies and technologies’ (Spiegel, 2001, 1; see Sax, 1989). The aim of applying a genealogical method in this dissertation is to situate the formation and development of *Hindutva* as an ideology in contrast to perspectives of right-wing extremism as a field of study in Western societies.

Much of the literature on *Hindutva* in India derives from the historical discipline, combining archival research with textual analysis into what can be considered the history of ideas. It traces the ideological development of *Hindutva* through writings of intellectuals and the establishment of organisations (Framke, 2016; Zachariah, 2015, 2014; Jaffrelot, 2007; Bhatt, 2001; Casolari, 2000; D’souza, 2000; Goodrick-Clarke, 1998). This methodological approach is complemented by insights from political science (Jaffrelot, 2015a, 2015b) and media and communications studies (Ahmed, Jaidka, & Cho, 2016; Chadha & Guha, 2016; Pal, Chandra, & Vydiswaran, 2016; Chakravartty & Roy, 2015; Pal 2015; Udupa, 2015; Rajagopal, 2014) from those researching contemporary modes of *Hindutva*. Yet, such scholarship on *Hindutva* is primarily confined to the field of South Asian studies, analysing *Hindutva* as an esoteric case and rarely drawing beyond regional studies for comparison.

Similarly, scholarship on right-wing extremism as a field of study is largely limited to case studies in Europe/North America, and builds on an epistemology from studies in fascism and Nazism. Scholars in history, political science, and sociology explain the shifts and growth of right-wing extremist ideology through the development of organisations and paramilitary/vigilante groups, as well as political parties (von Mering & McCarty, 2013; Backes & Moreau, 2012; Art, 2011; Hainsworth, 2008; Eatwell & Mudde, 2004; Davies & Lynch, 2002; Mudde, 2000; etc.). Such literature is equally esoteric, restricted to a geographical focus on Western societies.

Building on secondary sources, the first article of this dissertation thus attempts to bridge these separate strands of scholarship by tracing a historical lineage that compares and cements a common terminology. It contextualises *Hindutva* and right-wing extremism as not isolated phenomena, but interconnected and multilinear. In an attempt towards creating a universal definition, it consequently argues that *Hindutva* should be understood as a variant of right-wing extremism, and offers an
analytical contribution towards how we conceptualise right-wing extremism in its global manifestations. Overall, the tracing of an ideology for the first article of this dissertation serves as an intellectual foundation for the following four articles.

Qualitative Content Analysis on Social Media

During the Brexit and Trump campaigns in 2016, the emergence of pro-Brexit and pro-Trump social media accounts based on identitarian membership, such as ‘Sikhs for Britain’ and ‘Hindus for Trump’, sparked an initial interest in understanding these supporters. This phenomenon served ‘[to] stimulate research, providing an opportunity to explore some unusual occurrence or to test an explanatory idea’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, 23). Thus, the second methodology of this dissertation, employed in the second, third, and fourth articles, is a qualitative content analysis on social media of Indian diaspora Twitter users within the Brexit and Trump Twittersphere(s). It aims to answer the following sub-research questions: ‘How do Indian diaspora actors create an ideological linkage between diaspora Hindutva and the radical right in the West?’ and ‘How do Indian diaspora actors employ Western radical right discourse online?’

Previous research into the ideological connections between Hindutva and the Brexit and Trump campaigns, and particularly in reference to the role of Indian diaspora communities in the UK and US, is noticeably absent from the literature. One exception is Sitara Thobani (2019) on the relationship between Hindutva and American Hindu supporters for Trump. This study focuses on the role of groups such as the Republican Hindu Coalition, the Indian American Intellectual Forum, and Hindus for Trump which, in mobilising support for Trump, simultaneously foster the expansion of a global Hindutva that works in synergy with Trump’s nationalist agenda.

Thobani employs a mixed methods approach which includes:
- discourse analysis of Hindu for Trump blog posts, as well as articles written and speeches delivered by others aligned with this group; media analysis of news coverage of pro- Trump Hindu organizations; and visual and content analysis of the cultural performances and corresponding paraphernalia that brought mainstream recognition to this diasporic political project through their online circulation (4).

This approach is useful in situating how tropes and narratives of Hindutva served to mobilise diaspora support for Trump. But by focusing on diaspora organisations as agents of mobilisation—and this is
not to discredit the powerful role of these organisations—one needs to explore not only how diasporic individuals respond to these organisations, but also act as mobilisers and content creators in this space. As such, combining discourse, media, and visual analysis of materials produced by organisations needs to be supplemented with an in-depth study of individuals. This is well represented by the rich body of scholarship on diaspora Hindutva that primarily includes sociological and anthropological approaches, particularly given the nature of ethnographic research into various organisations, events, and community representatives. Much of this literature stems from researchers’ experiences in the field, whether attending talks and activities organised by diaspora Hindutva groups (Zavos, 2010; Rajagopal, 2000), including university campuses (Raj, 2000), collecting data in mandirs (Knott, 2009; Mukta, 2000), and interviews (Anderson, 2015; Mathew & Prashad, 2000). Other approaches include analysing content in local vernacular newspapers (Mukta, 2000), government reports (Anderson, 2015), and material derived from organisations’ official websites, blogs, and social media accounts (Anderson, 2015; Therwath, 2012; Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2012; Kurien, 2006; Mathew & Prashad, 2000; Raj, 2000; Bhatt, 2000; Mathew, 2000).

However, for this dissertation it is important to situate the processes of ‘online circulation’, that is, understanding how the medium of online spaces allow for the proliferation of ideas amongst these Indian diaspora individuals who support Brexit and Trump. Such individuals do not exist within a pre-defined online group, forum, or chat room per se, but rather consist of spatially distributed users who participate on the Twitter platform. Here, we can conceptualise these users as a network based on ‘the experience of mediated forms of engagement and to involve following connections rather than assuming physical co-presence in geographic space’ (Hine, 2015, 56). The practices and experiences of these users—who are themselves geographically distributed but connected through a digital medium—shape how ideas, strategies, and agendas are cultivated into offline political realities (i.e. the Brexit movement and Trump’s presidency) made possible by digital communication.

The Twitter sample of account users was manually chosen of diasporic Indians living in the UK and US who express pro-Brexit and/or pro-Trump political opinions, whether in the form of tweeting original content, retweets, mentions, and/or replies to other users. Determining account selection criteria was difficult due to a number of factors, not least that a limited number of accounts were explicit in revealing both Hindu identity and preference for Brexit and/or Trump. Often, Hindu names and/or photos became an indicator, although determining religious affiliation ran the risk of
essentialising ethnic/racial identities based on phenotype. In addition, a number of Sikh and Christian diaspora account users were actively posting pro-Brexit and/or pro-Trump content. Thus, it was decided based on these two considerations that data collection would include Hindu, Sikh, and Christian diaspora users.5

The location of accounts was determined by listed profile information and/or tweets that originated with British or American content which signalled deeper familiarity of local issues (this ran the risk of assuming knowledge was linked to place of residence). Although a small number of users tweeted solely about Brexit or Trump, a large majority of accounts contained overlapping material of both. By exploring users who tweet simultaneously about Brexit and Trump, this allows for a convergent rather than a comparative analysis at a transnational scale. In other words, the nature of social media exchange exemplified by Twitter, forces us to evaluate Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump not as separate phenomena but as a singular phenomenon.

Lastly, account users are both individuals and organisations, although a majority belong to the former. Some accounts belong to leaders, activists, or advocates, whilst others to non-affiliated individuals. The number of followers or levels of tweeting activity were not as significant as much as participating, i.e. producing content, in the pro-Brexit and pro-Trump Twitter network. The rationale for this selection was to determine how users perform their online political identities. Accounts that had never tweeted, however, were disregarded for the sample.

Access profoundly shaped data collection. This was due in large part to the ephemeral nature of Twitter. Over time, some account users did change privacy settings to protected tweets and data collection of users ceased unless tweets were made public again. Others had changed Twitter handles or to entirely new accounts, making it difficult to track accounts at times. Some had even deleted tweets (although this could still be documented if tweets were scraped prior to deletion).

Table 1 details the type of account user, for which two and seven are organisations in the UK and US, and thirteen and seventeen belong to individuals, respectively. The number of tweets for each account type is given rounded to the nearest thousandth, as is the number of followers.

5 See concluding chapter for more.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Account</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Tweets</th>
<th>Followers*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>0–1,000</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000–5,000</td>
<td>5,000–10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Breakdown of Twitter account users by type of account, country, number of tweets, and number of followers.

*Note: 5 accounts (1 organisation and 4 individuals) were deleted in the period following data collection and collation of the table. The number of followers for these accounts is unknown.

From April 2017 to April 2018, NVivo’s NCapture software was used to scrape entire timelines of the selected Twitter accounts, providing the first to most recent tweet of each account. The earliest tweet scraped was from 2010 and the last tweet scraped was from 2018. Scraps were downloaded every two weeks and analysed within four chronological phases (phase I from April 2017 to July 2017; phase II from July 2017 to October 2017; phase III from October 2017 to January 2018, and phase IV from January 2018 to April 2018). By allowing for a longitudinal study to prevent bias from data collection during one phase, analysing the data according to phases allowed to observe shifts, if any, in issue salience over time.

This dissertation employs a qualitative content analysis as described by Schreier (2012). In qualitative content analysis, the aim is to systematically describe the meaning of material, but only in certain respects that require specification, and in which the description of meaning serves a purpose for a basis of conclusion (3-4). In the context of this dissertation, conducting a qualitative content analysis of tweets entailed classifying all material of selected accounts (i.e. tweets) into categories for the coding scheme (i.e. nodes in NVivo). The categories were selected partially by data-driven material, but also referred to themes prevalent in radical right literature (see Rydgren, 2007; Kallis, 2015). In other words, rather than employing NVivo software to algorithmically determine categories, the coding scheme was inductively developed by assessing tweets in the preliminary stage of data collection. Given that users tweeted about local political context and/or issues, e.g. refugee crisis in Europe or CNN coverage of Trump, a qualitative coding manual was created to reflect users’ topical interests.

These five categories of the coding manual—that were further broken down by subcategory—include: 1) ‘immigration’ (including the subcategories ‘illegal’; ‘refugee’; ‘rape’; ‘multiculturalism’); 2) ‘foreign
policy’ (including the subcategories ‘EU’; ‘India’ and/or ‘Modi’ and/or ‘BJP’); 3) ‘establishment’
(including the subcategories ‘Clinton’; ‘Obama’; ‘Democrats’; ‘Labour’; ‘liberal’ and/or ‘left’; ‘media’
and/or ‘BBC’ and/or ‘CNN’); 4) ‘Islam’ (including the subcategories ‘Muslim’; ‘terrorism’ and/or
‘extremism’; ‘ISIS’); and 5) ‘Indian’ (including the subcategories ‘Hindu’). Tweets were coded to one
or more category/subcategory, depending on the content of the tweet.

Thus, instead of coding all the topics discussed by users, analysis was limited from all tweets to specific
and relevant tweets. This is at the core of the qualitative content analysis approach, which can be
characterised by flexibility—‘flexible in the sense that you will always have to tailor your coding frame
to your material’—and reduction—‘you limit your analysis to those aspects that are relevant’ (Schreier,
2012, 7). Here, the coding scheme was tailored to specific issues of concern within radical right
discourse, as well as awareness of Indian politics and markers of ethnic identity. Using qualitative
content analysis also allowed for the creation a coding scheme that changed over time as new codes
were added throughout the year of data collection. In total, 185,580 English-language tweets were
manually coded to result in 59,769 tweets included in the categories of the coding scheme.

Importantly, this approach resulted in extensive familiarity of these users in order to highlight the
‘cultural aspects of online social phenomena’ (Kozinets, 2010, 80). A year-long immersion of data
collection gained knowledge of users’ language use (see Bernard, 2002), vocabularies, and patterns of
engagement. This included awareness of Twitter culture, including the significance of sarcasm,
humour, meme posting, and trolling within radical right Internet sub-culture (see Nagle, 2017; Han,
2017). Understanding Twitter as a potentially rich research site, combined with knowledge of Indian
diaspora political activism in the UK and US, provided a context for interpreting knowledge gained
through data collection.

The result of using qualitative content analysis in this study can be characterised as a meso-level
approach: a small number of Twitter accounts (i.e. thirty-nine) with a large number of tweets (i.e.
185,580). By designing a coding scheme to arrive ‘at a higher level of abstraction than the more
concrete information in [the] material’ (Schreier, 2012, 7), content was compared across all relevant
tweets at an aggregate level. Coding tweets according to these categories allows us to explore the
nature of Twitter activity and interactions of Indian diaspora users in a specific and relevant way. It
further allows us to understand how these users participate within the broader Twittersphere culture
and community.
Quantitative Social Media Analysis

The third methodology employed is a quantitative social media analysis of these Indian diaspora Twitter users to map and trace interactions at a macro scale using computational methods and corpus linguistics in the fourth article. It subsequently strives to answer the fourth sub-research question, namely, ‘How do Indian diaspora actors embed themselves into the radical right online milieu in the West?’ Thus, whilst a qualitative content analysis provides insight into how users participate in conversations within the Brexit and Trump Twittersphere(s), a quantitative approach can supplement these findings by exploring wider dynamics of interaction at the network level. Three metrics were employed using a quantitative approach: 1) the probability of particular word collocations of all tweets, 2) network analysis of retweets, and 3) keyword analysis of all tweets.

Gathering word collocations of all tweets allows us to explore how Indian diaspora Twitter users articulate and frame key themes related to the radical right in the UK and US. Combined with findings from the qualitative analysis, this was explored in more detail using word collocations which illustrate words that are more likely to appear adjacent to the words representing the previously defined categories listed above (see Baker, 2006). It allows us to identify linguistic features of these users within a large corpus of tweets.

Word collocations are useful to measure the discourse of users, but in order to consider links between users, a network analysis can differentiate users into different groups that they engage with the most with their Twitter activity. To map the network of users, the most influential Twitter accounts who are retweeted by these users is measured based on degree centrality of each user in the network. This allows for a measurement of the most retweeted accounts by these users. The result tells us which Twitter accounts are the most influential for these users. Then, in order to position users into communities, a modularity class algorithm was used to identify communities in a network based on their connectivity to one another (Blondel et al., 2008). Breaking down users into communities allows us to determine characteristics, as well as compare similarities and differences such as information exchange between communities.

Breaking down retweets into communities can help discern a particular discourse within each community, as shaped by influential Twitter accounts in each community. But this finding can also be
strengthened utilising a keyword analysis of all tweets. To do so, all of the tweets in each community was collected into a corpus and turned into a frequency distribution of words. Using a chi-squared test, the frequency of each word in the community was compared with the frequency of the word across all communities. The result is a keyness value that identifies words most particular to a community. This provides us with a holistic overview of the main topics of discussion within each community.

By employing word collocations, network analysis techniques, and keyword analysis, this highlights the various and differentiated communities in which these users position themselves. A quantitative approach, when combined with previous qualitative findings, exposes the ideological fragmentation of these networks, and the issues that traverse across Twitter interactions. By mapping these Indian diaspora Twitter users, this approach explores how transnational linkages are being created by users.

Semi-structured Interviews

Gathering and analysing social media data provides insight into how Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump utilise online spaces in order to mobilise and participate in conversations within the Twitter network. It simultaneously allows us to map these users into a broad network of like-minded users who help shape political narratives within these movements. Yet, whilst online data does offer insight into how these users perform on social media platforms, it limits our understanding of individual perspectives which can only be achieved one-on-one. Hence, the fourth and last methodology utilises semi-structured interviews with Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump in the UK and US, respectively, in order to explore self-articulated, life experiences. In short, it assumes that ‘people construct data’ (Charmaz, 2006, 16). This approach seeks to answer the last sub-research question, ‘How do Indian diaspora actors negotiate between long-distance nationalist and nationalist attachments when supporting radical right agendas in the West?’

Initially, interviews were to be conducted with all the Twitter account users. However, lack of response from most of the contacted Twitter users resulted in what Miller & Bell (2002, 11) describe as the ‘need to rethink routes and modes of access both at the outset and once a study in underway is clearly
necessary in research that explores groups who may be difficult to access for a whole range of reasons’. This resulted in interviews obtained outside of the sample of Twitter users.

When it came to negotiating access, interviewees were approached using a variety of techniques and strategies which could only have been achieved after nearly a year of following their Twitter accounts. Indeed, by gaining an in-depth knowledge of not only the issues which concerned users, but the language in which these users expressed their political views, initial contact was made in a way that articulated why interviewees were interesting and how one could learn from their experiences (see Feldman et al., 2003, 7). Being able to persuade interviewees for an interview entailed being open and trustworthy towards their point of view (see Miller & Bell, 2002, 8; Feldman et al., 2003, 6). The most important strategy in this approach was tailoring interview requests according to their individual ‘language’ used on Twitter.

In effect, this meant relaying that their participation would help entail an understanding and explanation of pro-Brexit (if in the UK) and pro-Trump (if in the US) Indian diaspora views, but not revealing the project’s broader attempt to establish the transnational connections to Hindutva. It also meant emphasising that the candidate was not a journalist with a biased political agenda, as interviewees were highly suspicious of media representations concerning those with right-wing political views. And importantly, it was made clear that interviewees would be completely anonymous in the presentation of findings, which seemed to elicit more agreements to be interviewed—an indicator that this was a key concern for informants. Overall, negotiating access was not just a practical matter but based upon a deeper theoretical understanding, or ‘native wit’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, 41) gained over a year of Twitter data collection prior to requesting interviews.

For those who did not respond to requests, including prominent figures that inspired the study, this remains problematic. For example, Shalabh Kumar, who is the founder of the Republican Hindu Coalition, proved difficult in eliciting an interview. After obtaining his email address from a reluctant journalist at the Washington Post, who covered the organisation in an article, several attempts were made to contact him. At one point, Kumar replied to an email asking for a link to what had been written thus far, implying that he considered the candidate more as a journalist (despite making clear this was a PhD project). After following up with several emails, he still hasn’t replied to an interview request. This correspondence occurred over the course of a year to no response. This incident demonstrates a
common preoccupation for researchers attempting to access those in advantaged positions of ‘wealth, status, and power’, not least including the fact that ‘powerful groups in society that desire to protect themselves from social researchers are organizations and corporations’ (Adler & Adler, 2001, 9-10). As a wealthy entrepreneur who heads an advocacy organisation, Kumar also serves as an adviser in Trump's administration. Given the fact that an interview was unable to be obtained with this key informant, this limited an ability to gather data that provides unique insight for the study.

In total, thirteen interviewees conducted from January to October 2018.

Table 2 details interviewees in the UK:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Interview format</th>
<th>Twitter user</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Management consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Twitter DM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Conservative Party candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Advisor for Conservative Party and Vote Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Twitter DM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Holds master’s in business administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Retired medical doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Twitter DM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Holds master’s in politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 details interviewees in the US:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Interview format</th>
<th>Twitter user</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Entrepreneur and Republican candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Entrepreneur and Director of think tank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Entrepreneur and Republican candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Twitter DM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Investment analyst</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: US interviews

Interviews were conducted through various mediums of interaction: Twitter Direct Messenger (4), over the phone (2), via Skype video (1), or in person (6). These mediums affected the type of information obtained from interviewees and the length of the interview. For those who preferred to respond using Twitter DM, the number of questions were limited and interviewees could reply at their convenience. Some replied instantly whereas others would respond after a week of sending questions. These interviews were straightforward in manner and didn’t allow for much flexibility to gather information about personal background (although these came across in the responses) and tended to focus more on political issues. Interviews conducted through other mediums, however, allowed for a more flexible approach. These provided a mix of personal narratives and broader discussion of issues. The interview setting also affected the length of offline interviews, where meeting at a café facilitated a more relaxed environment (resulting in over 2 hour interviews), as opposed to interviews conducted during an event surrounded by fast-paced activity (resulting in shorter interviews of 20 minutes). An interview guide is supplied in Appendix 2.

Interviewees are additionally similar in demographic attributes. Many come from middle- to upper-middle, or wealthy class backgrounds, often live in cosmopolitan urban areas, are highly educated with bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and are employed in professional occupations. Further, most
Interviewees are private citizens, but a few have public profiles, either as consultants for political parties or candidates for public office. This reflects the literature on Indian diaspora communities in the UK and US as well-integrated and disproportionately successful model minorities, highlighted above. Yet, there exists more variation in the UK concerning class divisions, particularly those employed as shop keepers, factory workers, etc. This is not reflected in the UK-based interviewees, most of whom are highly educated and highly skilled. In contrast to the UK, Indian Americans are predominately middle and upper class, most of whom are entrepreneurs or work in finance/business or IT. This is reflected by US-based interviewees, all of whom are engaged in these sectors. The consequence of this was observed by Bhatt (2000) nearly two decades ago:

A striking characteristic of diaspora Hindutva movements is how sociologically different they are from each other, even as they profess identical ideological and political goals and use virtually identical political symbols. The high profile non-resident Indian [NRI] media and Internet confidence of the newly wealthy technocrats of the American VHP reflects a relatively recent migration process from India to the US of aspiring professionalized urban Indian groups. Its sociological features are at some remove from the migration in the 1970s from east Africa to the UK of descendants of indentured labourers and merchants who had originated from the rural villages and port towns of Gujarat and the Punjab during the last and earlier parts of this century. In neither process is there stasis in tradition, belief or caste. In both cases, class and racialization become important factors in community formation. But their manifestations can be radically different’ (563-4).

In sum, the sociological differences between the UK and US-based diasporas continue to persist, despite the impacts of globalisation and technological affordances. This indicates that boundary maintenance practices as discussed in the theory chapter above, may continue to be vital towards understanding the reproduction of these communities.

One of the key obstacles when conducting interviews was penetrating levels of distrust and suspicion from informants. Although they agreed to an interview, for some, there still existed some resistance towards the candidate. However, as interviews progressed, and despite some difficult moments, interviewees would gradually open up about themselves, and enjoy talking about their views (see Menjívar, 2000; Thai, 2008). This shift came as a result of reciprocity which ensued throughout the interviews, whereby the candidate displayed a genuine interest in understanding what they had to say without judgement. Key to this approach was employing grounded theory interviewing techniques that involved open-ended questions, which allowed informants to articulate what was meaningful to their lives (Charmaz, 2006, 26). This created an informal and less structured environment that made informants feel less threatened with carefully phrased questions that sought to explore, not interrogate
Interviewees hence had significant leeway to discuss issues that mattered to them rather than feeling like questions were being imposed onto them. However, nearly all interviewees gave the impression that such interviews would be limited to a one-time occurrence. It was thus decided that interviewees would not be approached for subsequent interviews based on first interview experiences.

### Ethical Considerations

#### Twitter data

Despite Twitter being publically available data, in which the user agrees to terms and conditions of allowing their data to be available to third-parties when creating an account, this project had to secure ethical approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) in order to comply with issues of access, consent, and the protection of anonymity and privacy in reporting findings.

When it came to access and informed consent, this was negotiated with NSD such that Twitter users would not have to be notified when accessing their data. Whilst it is standard for researchers to secure consent for data collection, the case was made that doing so would risk being blocked and/or denied access by users. NSD decided that the project would be exempt from the obligation to inform the sample, due to the fact that doing so would be considered disproportionately difficult to inform all users. Further, NSD assessed that data collection would not be intrusive, given that it deals with data which users have voluntarily made known to a larger group of people, with a desire for a public audience. It was determined that these users must expect to reach a large audience, and their tweets might be used in contexts for which they have no control over, such as research purposes. Consequently, NSD assessed that the larger benefit of public interest outweighs the users’ privacy disadvantage.

The data collected would have to be made anonymous in all publications of the project so as not report any personal identifying information of the Twitter users. This was solved by using pseudonyms to ensure anonymity, and omitting a combination of background variables (such as residence/workplace, age, and gender). What became complicated, however, was the necessity to not use direct
quotations from tweets, as these could be searchable in an internet database and subsequently linked to a user. Thus, tweets were reworded, whilst still maintaining the substance of the content. Of course, this posed a problematic consideration, in which ‘there are limits to how much the context can be manipulated when data are presented, without being accused of fabricating data’ (Tyldum, 2012, 7). Unlike a verbal quote, however, all the Twitter data is available and can be easily traced to a source. This was particularly difficult but necessary in order to prevent users from being identified. Taking these steps helped alleviate the possibility of users’ confidentiality being breached.

Lastly, when it came to the positionality of the candidate, there were safety concerns. A ‘lurking’ approach was taken, due to employment at the Center for Research on Extremism—which has been a target of right-wing extremists—in which the candidate risked being viewed as an extension of the centre with consequent repercussions (see Shenton & Hayter, 2004, 224; Feldman et al., 2003, 9). The candidate had also been previously employed by British Muslim non-profit organisations, which additionally became a concern. Throughout the year of data collection, however, the candidate engaged with some users about the project. A few users had retweeted and/or replied to the candidate’s tweets related to the project, some followed the candidate as they were curious about the project, and others shared the candidate’s op-ed media articles. Whilst many of these interactions were positive, the candidate also received negative responses within the wider Twitter network, especially from those holding more extreme political viewpoints, such as trolling and verbal abuse.

Interview data

In gaining access for interviews with Twitter users, the candidate’s institutional affiliation would appear first in the search results if one of the users conducted a Google search. There was only so much information about the candidate’s status that could be hidden, affecting an initial ability to establish rapport (see Thai, 2008, 156-9). For reaching out to interviewees in person, such as at an event, the process was much easier, as the candidate could circumvent an online presence. For all interview requests, however, the candidate had to employ a balance of honesty about the role whilst simultaneously remaining vague about the project’s specific purpose (see Adler & Adler, 2001, 18; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, 42). Not providing a ‘full’ account of research in the beginning was a maneuver to prevent refused access (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, 57).
At the onset of interviews, the insider/outsider dichotomy endemic in qualitative research was a concern. In addition to the institutional affiliation concerns highlighted above, being a young, female candidate echoes Menjívar’s positionality: ‘my own social characteristics might have influenced my relationship with informants and thus shaped the nature of the data I gathered’ (2000, 245). On the whole, reactions to the candidate’s positionality were mixed. Many were curious about the candidate’s background and the decision to embark on this project. A few were initially resistant and probed for more details regarding the project before agreeing to be interviewed, in effect testing to see if the candidate was genuine and could be trusted. Others, despite several attempts to inquire for an interview, were nonresponsive and hence the candidate was rejected many times (see Feldman et al., 2003, 9).

Overall, there were a variety of responses, but what stood out were the motives for why some became interviewees whilst others declined an interview request (see Miller & Bell, 2002, 5). One noteworthy individual, who played a significant role in the Leave campaign for Brexit, went out of his way to ensure that the candidate had ‘all the facts’ and even sent additional reading materials. He was pleased that an academic was researching this topic given that it is severely underreported in the public debate. For this interviewee, there was an underlying expectation that the candidate would send to him writing to review. Thus, gaining access and building trust nearly elicited a quid pro quo scenario. Such instances highlight what Tyldum (2012, 5) describes as the actual means to build trust: ‘[w]hat are the boundaries of what are acceptable strategies for building trust amongst respondents?’ A few felt that given the candidate’s ‘outsider’ status, this automatically equated to naivety, and consequently provided respondents an opportunity to ‘educate’ the candidate on issues. Thus, the positioning as a researcher reflects the problematic view of an insider/outsider dichotomy in accessing respondents, when identity fluctuates across various communities and power relations (see Thai, 2008, 147).

Lastly, one of the interviews conducted was achieved via a gate-keeper. Tyldum (2012, 4) writes that ‘[i]n my experience, gatekeeper recruitment has resulted in some of the most ethically challenging interviews’. This certainly held true in this case. Referred to by a friend, the candidate interviewed his mother, which seemed like a good opportunity. The power of the friend in volunteering his mother, however, had unforeseen consequences. Firstly, the issue of consent arose. Whilst his mother agreed to the interview, it is unknown how the friend persuaded her to do so. It was determined that consent occurred once she agreed to participate, but without securing trust beforehand—as had achieved in
negotiating access with other interviewees—it is unknown what effect this had on her decision to be an interviewee. Secondly, she had brought up her son many times throughout the interview. Although she used him as a placeholder to explain a wider point, the candidate was highly conscious of his power as a gate-keeper in this instance. Finally, after the interview the candidate couldn’t discuss with the friend what his mother spoke about during the interview as this was bound by an ethical obligation to keep such information confidential. Thus, placing the friend as a gate-keeper allowed access to an interviewee whom otherwise would had been difficult to reach, but it simultaneously created an ethical dilemma.
5 Summary of Articles

Article I

_Hindutva as a variant of right-wing extremism_

Accepted in *Patterns of Prejudice*

This article serves as a conceptual foundation for the dissertation by discussing the origins, growth, and mainstreaming of *Hindutva* in India. Using a genealogical approach, it argues that *Hindutva* has been misrepresented by scholars of right-wing extremism in the West as a form of religious extremism, when it should rather be characterised as a form of ethno-nationalism; this is due to *Hindutva*’s emphasis on religion and territory as conditional of Hindu identity. On the other hand, studies of *Hindutva* have previously been confined to South Asian scholars who situate it as an esoteric case of the subcontinent. Thus, this article attempts to bridge these two bodies of literature towards achieving a universal definition of right-wing extremism.

It does so by first illustrating how the origins of *Hindutva* are deeply connected to transnational ties with Italian Fascism and German Nazism, influencing its intellectual development and modus operandi. It then traces how following India’s independence, *Hindutva* grew and became integral towards defining a majoritarian identity through violence marking the boundaries of the new nation-state. Finally, it highlights how contemporary *Hindutva* became ‘mainstreamed’ in 2014 with the election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose embodiment of the authentic, populist India with a promising future has cemented the exclusion of those who do not feature in the nation’s majoritarianism. The re-election of Modi in 2019 exemplifies not only what happens when a right-wing extremist party is in power, but the impact that has upon society at large.

By tracing the ideological, historical, and organisational dimensions of *Hindutva*, this article provides an analytical contribution towards a universal definition which posits *Hindutva* and right-wing extremism in the West as a global phenomenon. In doing so, it addresses a theoretical and empirical lacuna in current literature on right-wing extremism.
Article II

From cyber-Hindutva to Ab Ki Baar Trump Sarkar: (Trans)national entanglements of Hindu diaspora political participation

Under review in edited volume Patterns of Political Integration in Indian Diaspora Societies (Routledge)

This book chapter highlights the ideological linkages between diaspora Hindutva and the radical right in the West. It builds off of the first article by taking as its starting point Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s 2014 electoral victory, and follows the operationalisation of long-distance nationalism amongst the diaspora in the UK and US. It explores the role of the diaspora, officially and unofficially, in securing Modi’s victory. The former was manifested in campaign operations online, whilst the latter through a networked phenomenon of cyber-Hindutva, or Internet Hindus.

Diaspora Hindutva, however, has a long legacy which is not only present online, but offline through the establishment of diaspora Hindutva organisations. These organisations are not solely long-distance nationalist in their orientation, but equally constituted by policies of multiculturalism in the UK and US, which reinforce their boundary-making practices of minority identity formation. Key towards such boundary-making is the anti-Islam and anti-Muslim ideological positioning of these organisations. The emergence of the Brexit and Trump campaigns, which articulated Islamophobic tropes, provided a political opportunity to synergise these movements with diaspora Hindutva narratives.

This book chapter then examines a case study of the Republican Hindu Coalition (RHC)—an advocacy organisation which endorsed Trump—and the RHC’s sponsored Ab Ki Baar Trump Sarkar campaign advertisement targeting Hindu American voters. It argues that the Ab Ki Baar Trump Sarkar campaign, which merges religious genres with geopolitical realities, indicates a new mode of networked connectivity made possible by mass media consumption. As such, this book chapter turns to a year-long qualitative content analysis study of Hindu diaspora Twitter users who support Brexit and Trump. It reveals that these users interact at three levels of entanglement: relations between the homeland and diaspora, across diaspora communities in the UK and US, and alliances with Western radical right figures. This last entanglement marks a new mode of diaspora political participation and mobilisation.
This book chapter has two main findings. The first is that while diaspora Hindutva organisations continue to hold a powerful role, it is individuals who are seeking to create a voice through the medium of online spaces. By challenging the institutional framework of organisations, individuals exert a shift in diaspora representation. The second finding is that a new ideological hybridity emerges when diaspora Hindutva converges with the radical right in the West. United by shared practices of Muslim ‘othering’, proponents of diaspora Hindutva and Western radical right actors (re)produce narratives of exclusionary nationalism.

Article III

Immigrant, nationalis t and proud: A Twitter analysis of Indian diaspora supporters for Brexit and Trump

Published in Media and Communication, special issue ‘Communicating on/with Minorities’, Volume 7, Issue 1, pages 77-89, 2019.

This article explores how Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump employ radical right discourse online. Given that the Brexit and Trump campaigns utilised Islamophobic and anti-establishment statements, this provided an opportunity for those in the Indian diaspora with shared sentiments to vocalise their support using similar rhetoric. From this premise, this article analyses Twitter accounts of Indian diaspora users who share pro-Brexit and pro-Trump content. It applies qualitative content analysis throughout a year of data collection and analysis, situating how users interact and engage on the Twitter sphere.

It finds that these Indian diaspora Twitter users, who compose of Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians, draw upon diaspora Hindutva narratives to frame their political views. By using vocabulary such as ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’, this further reinforces the trope that Muslims are a problematic ‘other’. In doing so, these users are united by an anti-Muslim agenda in order to assert their belonging in Western societies. Such rhetoric also plays into Western radical right ideas and strategies.

Twitter offers a space for these Indian diaspora users to articulate radical right themes on multiple levels: as individuals, as part of a collective non-Muslim Indian diaspora, and as part of radical right
Twitter society. Untangling these layers provides insight into how social media platforms can foster the construction of ethnic and (trans)national identities.

**Article IV**

**New forms of civic nationalism? American and British Indians in the Trump and Brexit Twittersphere**

Co-authored with Dr Bharath Ganesh and Dr Jonathan Bright

Submitted to *Nations and Nationalism*, special issue ‘Digital Nationalism, Social Media, and Strongmen’

This article maps how Indian diaspora actors embed themselves into the British and American radical right online milieu. It argues that diaspora and migrant networks do not only display long-distance nationalism when using online platforms, but can equally contribute to nationalist myth making within their countries of residence. By situating the Western radical right’s turn to civic nationalist rhetoric, this has allowed for the rise of ethnic minority and immigrant supporters who also express these values as a basis of exclusion. Such articulations of civic nationalism which obfuscate an exclusionary agenda has similarly been adopted by diaspora *Hindutva* advocates. The Brexit and Trump campaigns bestowed an opportunity to synthesise diaspora *Hindutva* with Western radical right agendas as articulated through forms of civic nationalism.

Consequently, this article focuses on how Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump take to Twitter to express political views, but also embed themselves into the British and American radical right milieu by consolidating around civic nationalist frames. It builds upon the previous qualitative study of Indian diaspora users by complementing this approach with qualitative analyses, including network analysis and keyword analysis. Using quantitative approaches allows for exploration of a few dynamics raised in qualitative findings that require different methods and scales of analysis, such as extent of participation in the Twitter network and transnational connections.

This article provides insight into how these Indian diaspora users share civic nationalist discourse that portrays ‘others’ (i.e. illegal immigrants, Islam/Muslims, and the leftist political and media establishment) as not conforming to the values of the nation. By extension, these users promote exclusionary displays of nationalism. Importantly, this article also finds that despite being confined to
national contexts, these users are uniquely transnationally oriented in their Twitter activity within the radical right online milieu.

**Article V**

**Looking back, looking forward: Nationalist imaginaries of Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump**

Unpublished manuscript

This article compares how Indian diaspora individuals negotiate between long-distance nationalist and nationalist attachments when supporting radical right agendas in the West. Through interviews with British Indians and Indian Americans who support Brexit and Trump, respectively, it situates through the experiences of interviewees their simultaneous employment of these attachments when justifying their support. Hence, this article calls for an approach in methodological transnationalism, which recognises diaspora actors as not just long-distance nationalists, but nationalists as well; this conceptual framework also requires addressing the role that diaspora networks play in shaping and adapting long-distance nationalism towards the creation of new nationalist narratives.

It finds that long-distance nationalist sentiments are most pronounced amongst British Indian Brexiteers when expressing nostalgia for Empire and the Commonwealth, whereas Indian American Trump supporters look towards promising future US-India relations. On the other hand, these interviewees articulate nationalist affinities when describing similar experiences of immigration and settlement. This article further examines disparities between these diaspora communities with regards to temporal outlook, the role of class, and generational shifts. However, despite such differences, they share a common feature of boundary-making and maintenance practices. This article thus attempts to situate how diasporic identity formation processes leads to the emergence of not competing, but complementary nationalisms that are fundamentally exclusionary.
6   Concluding Discussion

Shortly before submitting this dissertation, an event was held in Houston, Texas titled ‘Howy Modi!’ sponsored by the Texas India Forum. Modi and Trump entered the stage together to a cheering crowd of more than 50,000 attendees. Behind a podium emblazoned with the flags of the US and India, a projector bore the words ‘Shared Dreams, Bright Futures’. Modi delivered opening remarks by stating that upon meeting Trump, he knew that ‘India has a true friend in the White House’. Trump later returned the compliment, declaring ‘I look forward to working with you to make our nations even more prosperous than ever before’. After Modi delivered a long speech in Hindi, the two world leaders left the rally together holding hands and waving to the crowd.

This dissertation unpacks moments such as these and the instances described in the introduction. It encompasses two main findings for reflection. The first is that transnational entanglements between Hindutva and the Western radical right results in an ideological hybridity. By virtue of the Indian diaspora acting as a bridge between these movements, exclusionary elements within each are brought forth and merged into a new expression. This does not underestimate the transnational flows of ideas and people that have long existed. Certainly, ideologies have never existed in a vacuum. Rather, this dissertation serves to highlight the historical and contemporary dynamics of interaction by which such interconnections are formed, shaped, and reconfigured at multiple scales.

Such transnational processes are enacted with the aim to reinforce nationalist imaginaries. Consequently, the second main finding is the notion of complementary, and not competing, nationalisms. Here, distinct nationalist projects can operate in such a way that they are mutually beneficial, given that boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of who belongs to the nation are clearly defined. By working in unison, this allows for the reproduction of difference as something to be defined against, to be ‘othered’, and to constitute claims for national identity making.

A supplementary finding to these two was an unexpected one of this dissertation: the uniting of Hindu, Sikh, and Christian Indian diaspora individuals as a result of anti-Muslim distancing practices. Importantly, at times, Sikh and Christian diaspora individuals did express disdain for Hindutva. But what added richness to the data was that these individuals notably distinguished themselves by explicitly asserting a non-Muslim identity. This reveals a new and interesting mode of non-Muslim
Indian diaspora mobilisation, namely, convergence around anti-Muslim anxiety. Thus, some Hindu, Sikh, and Christian Indian diaspora individuals help reconstruct the myth of Muslim ‘otherness’ in order to cement the notion that Muslims do not belong with their nationalist imaginaries.

When considering future avenues for research, this first beckons the question of whether or not this case study of the Indian diaspora and its relationship to Hindutva is an exception. Perhaps the Brexit and Trump campaigns merely served as convenient political opportunities, and were it not for Hindutva’s originating connections to the West, the legacy of diaspora Hindutva organisations, and the election of Modi and resulting mainstreaming of Hindutva, this study would not be possible.

But it also raises important questions concerning narratives of belonging in Western societies. Will we see a rise in ethnic minority, immigrant, or other diaspora communities supporting the radical right in Western societies? And if so, how will such engagement be mobilised and articulated? What will be the catalyst for their emergence? These questions are as much about political participation as they are about the future of democratic societies. The rise of the radical right around the world will undoubtedly continue to spark timely discussions on the role of nationalism and who constitutes the nation.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1: Chart of Hindutva organisations in India, UK, and US

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Appendix 3: Co-author declaration and confirmation
Appendix 1

Chart of family of *Hindutva* organisations in India, UK, and US

![Diagram of the family of Hindutva organisations in India, UK, and US](image)

**SANGH PARIVAR**

**RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH**

1925

**VISHWA HINDU PARISHAD**
(culture & religion)
1964

- **VHP**
  - UK
  - 1969

- **HSS**
  - UK
  - 1966

- **VHPA**
  - 1970

- **HSS USA**
  - 1989

- **National Hindu Students Forum**
  - 1991

- **Hindu Students Council**
  - 1987

**BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY**
(politics)
1980

- **Overseas Friends of BJP**
  - **OFBJP**
    - UK
    - 1992

  - USA
    - 1991
Appendix 2

Interview Guide

Initial approach for interview request on Twitter:

i. UK-based interviews
Hi [insert name], I’m a PhD researcher looking at British Indians who support Brexit. I want to chat with you about why you voted Leave and where you feel the establishment has failed with Brexit today. Unlike a journalist, I want to understand and explain your views, not insert bias. Any conversation will be anonymous. Thanks, Eviane

ii. US-based interviews
Hi [insert name], I’m a PhD researcher looking at Indian Americans who support Trump. I want to chat with you about why you support Trump and his policies. Unlike a journalist, I want to understand and explain your views, not insert bias. Any conversation will be anonymous. Thanks, Eviane

Interview guide:

Thank you for agreeing to an interview. As I mentioned when I first contacted you, this is part of my PhD project and your participation is very valuable. I would like to emphasise that anything you say in this interview is anonymous and will be kept confidential. You may choose to withdraw at any time. Let’s begin by you telling me a bit about yourself?

i. UK-based interviews
What is your take on Brexit? Why did you vote Leave?

Did your views change during or after the referendum?

What are your thoughts on the referendum campaign overall?

Did you agree with Leave’s campaigning strategies during the referendum?

Given that the Leave campaign focused heavily on migration, are you also concerned about migration?

Is it primarily EU migration that you are concerned about, or other migrant groups as well?

Do you identify as a commonwealth migrant, Indian, or other ethnic group? Is this important to you?

Do you think Commonwealth migrants see immigration differently from other Britons?

Are you involved in community organisations, or other politically active groups?

What is your opinion of party politics? The mainstream media?
Where do you think Brexit has thus far failed and succeeded in the negotiations thus far?

Why do you like to use Twitter to share your political views? Are you political on other social media platforms?

ii. US-based interviews

Why do you support Trump?

Did your views change during the election campaign or after Trump began the presidency?

What are your thoughts on the 2016 election overall?

Did you agree with all of Trump’s policies for his election campaign platform? What resonated with you?

What do you think of the current Trump administration’s immigration policies, and are you also concerned about immigration?

Is it primarily immigration from Central America and Mexico that you are concerned about, or other migrant groups as well?

Do you identify as an immigrant, Indian, or desi? Is this important to you?

Do you think Indian Americans see immigration differently from other Americans?

Are you involved in community organisations, or other politically active groups?

What is your opinion of partisan politics? The mainstream media?

Where do you think Trump has far failed and succeeded in his administration thus far?

Why do you like to use Twitter to share your political views? Are you political on other social media platforms?
Appendix 3

Co-author declaration and confirmation

Co-author declaration and confirmation

Required enclosure when requesting that a thesis be evaluated for a doctoral degree at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography (the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Oslo).

Describing the independent research contributions of the candidate and each co-author

This declaration should describe the independent research contributions of both the candidate and each of the coauthors for each paper constituting the thesis. The descriptions follow the recommendation from The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (the "Vancouver Declaration") See the three criteria for authorship below. All three criteria must be fulfilled in order to be named co-author:

1.) My contribution to conception and design, or development and analysis of a theoretical model, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data

2.) My contribution to drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content

3.) I have approved the version to be published:

For each article the declaration should be completed (capital letters if handwritten) and (electronic) signed by the candidate and the co-author(s). Use additional form(s) if necessary. The last page should include all authors' signatures to ensure that you have looked through the declarations, and find the descriptions in accordance with your view of the co-operation that has taken place.

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Paper no.: 4

Title: New forms of civic nationalism? American and British Indians in the Brexit and Trump Twittersphere

Candidate: Eviane Leidig

Authors: Leidig, Eviane, Ganesh, Bharath, and Bright, Jonathan

The contribution of the candidate:

1.) The candidate led in all parts of the conception and design, the analysis of a theoretical model, the acquisition of data, and the analysis and interpretation of the data.

2.) The candidate led drafting all sections of the article, and in the subsequent revisions of the article. The first version of the paper was drafted by the candidate with input from the co-authors on methodology and data collection. The following versions of the paper will be
jointly revised by the candidate and co-authors, based on discussion and agreement of necessary changes and adjustments from reviewers.

3.) The candidate has approved the version to be published.

Candidate (capital letters): EVIANE LEIDIG

Co-author's contribution:
1.) The co-author applied quantitative data analysis and corpus linguistic techniques to data collected by the candidate to provide findings for interpretation. The co-author also contributed to discussions on research design and analytical approaches.

2.) The co-author contributed drafting for the methodological and analytical sections of the paper, and will contribute to future revisions. The co-author provided intellectually important content in the form of methods and data analysis.

3.) The co-author approves the version to be published.

Name (capital letters): BHARATH GANESH

Co-author's contribution:
1.) The co-author applied quantitative data analysis techniques to data collected by the candidate. The co-author also contributed to discussions on research design and analytical approaches.

2.) The co-author provided intellectually important content by validating and helping to revise methods used in the article.

3.) The co-author approves the version to be published.

Name (capital letters): JONATHAN BRIGHT

I have looked through the declaration from the other co-authors, and find the descriptions of their contribution in accordance with my view of the cooperation that has taken place
**Hindutva** as a variant of right-wing extremism

Eviane Leidig

Accepted in *Patterns of Prejudice*

**Abstract**

This article addresses a theoretical and empirical lacuna by introducing *Hindutva* in the terminology of right-wing extremism. It situates the origins of *Hindutva* in colonial India as it emerged through sustained interaction with ideologues in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, who in turn, engaged with *Hindutva* to further 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 current Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. Modi mobilised along recurring themes of a Muslim ‘threat’ to the Hindu majority in order to construct a narrative to further Hindu insecurity. The result is that *Hindutva* has become synonymous with Indian nationalism. This article seeks to bridge the scholarly divide between, on one hand, the study of right-wing extremism as a field dominated by Western scholars and disciplines and, on the other hand, 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 how we might conceptualise right-wing extremism in its global manifestations.

**Introduction**

*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’

*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 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’

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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 in 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 socio-political phenomenon, this article posits Hindutva as a term with a spanning ideology; it encompasses a spectrum in the form of violent, paramilitary fringe groups, to organisations that advocate restoring Hindu 'culture', to contesting party politics. By refining the definition of Hindutva in this manner, we can subsume its expression into universal dimensions of right-wing extremism.

This article begins with the transnational engagements between South Asian and European intellectual spheres as Hindutva emerged vis-à-vis Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Hindutva in pre-independence India sought to incorporate elements from European models into its own modus operandi. At the same time, intellectuals in Europe engaged with Hindutva ideologues to further ideological developments. Following India’s independence in 1947, Hindutva has been instrumental in nation-building and majoritarian identity in India. Hindutva actors view violence as a legitimate means towards ethno-national territorial claims, which has, at times, been enacted by the state. Yet, Hindutva truly succeeded as a mainstream phenomenon in 2014 with the election of current 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 experiences of xenophobia and prejudice confined to Western definitions, this leaves a considerable intellectual gap of its diverse lived forms. This article showcases how right-wing extremism operates in a non-Western, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society, in order to shed light on the paradigmatic resemblances between various exclusionary nationalisms.

**Right-Wing Extremism Beyond the West**

The birth of right-wing extremism in Europe originates from European philosophical exchanges in the 19th century which signaled the rise in popularity of fascist thought. This is best exemplified by Hegel’s critique of the philosopher Jakob Fries, who argued on the basis of moral subjectivism: ‘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. Fries’ involvement with the *Burschenschaften*, a German student union propagating anti-Semitic calls to action in the name of German nationalism, has been likened to an early formation of right-wing extremist ideology, such that ‘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.’

These ideological developments became dominant when European fascism came to fruition shortly before the Second World War. Here, fascism drew from principles of radicalism, anarchism, and populism, heavily influenced by anarchist and socialist movements during the early 20th century. Fascism is defined as ‘a genius of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.’ Populist ultra-nationalism subsequently refers to conceptualising the nation as a ‘racial, historical, spiritual or organic reality’ with a distinct community of members whom belong. Following 1945, fascism has since disintegrated into factions in response to various political environments. Scholars have thus shifted their attention towards examining the extreme right that developed into several movements, organisations, and parties across Europe in the decades following the Second World War. The rise of extreme right organisations and paramilitary/vigilante groups, as well as political parties, is well documented. Influential academic scholarship on contemporary right-wing extremism as a field of study is thus primarily confined to a geographical focus on Europe and North America (and subsequently published in academies located in these regions), building on ideological and organisational developments originating from earlier studies in fascism and Nazism.

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Despite a plethora of comparative literature on right-wing extremism in the Western context very little research has been conducted outside this terrain. The exception are case studies in Turkey⁹, South Africa¹⁰, Israel¹¹, Japan¹², and Indonesia,¹³¹⁴ which often adopt the typology used to characterise right-wing extremism in the West as a springboard for conceptual comparison. This article employs a similar approach in the case of India, in order 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 religious nationalism rather than primarily ethno-nationalist. The influential fascism scholar Robert Paxton, for instance, notes that ‘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, whilst Paxton does acknowledge that ‘no two fascisms need be alike in their symbols in rhetoric, employing, as they do, the local patriotic repertory’,¹⁶ the notion that religious identity takes precedence over national identity is flawed when considering the evolution of Hindutva as an ideology seeking to create an ethno-nationalist state.

Paxton’s analysis indicates a need for critique in the way that religion is conceptualised amongst Western scholars, and is especially consequential for those who focus on right-wing extremism.

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¹⁴ See also Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Fascism Outside Europe: The European Impulse Against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism (New York: Columbia University Press 2002).
¹⁶ Paxton, The Anatomy of Fascism, 204.
Paxton, largely due to 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 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 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 and that the tendency to make this false parallel 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. 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 and this laid the foundation for Hindu leaders to reinvent Hinduism as a modern, universal, and missionary religion. 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 encompasses the ability to practice religion in which the state affords religious plurality. India embodies a ‘contextual secularism’ in which the relationship between religion and state can be characterised not by ‘a strict wall of separation’ but a ‘principled distance’. Or succinctly put, ‘that even when a State is tolerant of religions, it need not lead to religious tolerance in a society’. In this way, India has never truly experienced a Western form of secularism; its post-independence political landscape has witnessed continuous expressions of religiosity on the basis that such expressions are inherently egalitarian. Indeed, this problematic implementation of Western concepts is precisely what Menski describes as a ‘serious methodological

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error committed by this approach 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.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, ‘Hindu fundamentalists’ reactions to the state as a ‘secular’ institution challenges religious coexistence rather than practicing religion per se.

Further, and on a related note, Paxton displays a misunderstanding of religion as ‘an intense attachment’ for ‘Hindu fundamentalists’. As will be discussed throughout the article, \textit{Hindutva} is not centred on religion (although Hinduism does play a significant role), but rather how religion is \textit{politicised} in such a way that being a Hindu equates belonging to an ethno-nationalist identity. Indeed, the founder of \textit{Hindutva}, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, stressed that religion is not even the most important element of Hindu identity, but the combination of sacred territory, race, and language as influenced by Western theories of nationalism.\textsuperscript{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 a particular obsession with religiosity.\textsuperscript{24} In this sense, fundamentalism can have local expressions based on contextual nuance, e.g. Hindu, Islamic, Christian, 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 \textit{Hindutva} has largely been confined to the field of South Asian studies. This esotericism is due to the fact that \textit{Hindutva} is viewed as inherently unique to the subcontinent. Consequently, most scholars of \textit{Hindutva} describe it as religious or majoritarian nationalism (with the connotation of an insular case), before detailing the intricacies of South Asian communal politics. Although such scholars do acknowledge the complexity of \textit{Hindutva} as an ideology that deploys cultural and ethno-national sentiments to develop a 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 \textit{Hindutva} is an isolated ideological phenomenon. It does not disregard the circumstantial origin, evolution, and adaptation of \textit{Hindutva}, but it illustrates this

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Werner Menski, ‘Assessing communal conflicts and Hindu fascism in India’, \textit{European Yearbook of Minority Issues}, vol. 8, 2009, 313-335 (313).
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Torkel Brekke, \textit{Fundamentalism: Prophecy and Protest in an Age of Globalization} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2011).
\end{itemize}
development in congruence with global ideological engagements, especially with Italian Fascism and German Nazism linkages early on. Despite the lack of continued physical engagement with European contemporaries following the Second World War/India’s independence, this article argues that Hindutva in India parallels right-wing extremism in the West. Whilst India’s ‘pluralism and diversity is not a postmodern phenomenon, [but] has ancient roots in the most distant layers of Indian cultures’, 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 correspondence with broader geopolitical dynamics. It demonstrates how ideological and organisational developments occurred vis-à-vis European contemporaries such that these engagements were mutually interconnected at a fundamental level. At the same time, Hindutva offers new insight into alternative expressions of ethno-nationalism, authoritarianism, and chauvinism well suited to provide new perspectives on right-wing extremism as a global phenomenon.

**Common Origins**

The intellectual journey of Hindutva began in the 19th century, emerging as an anti-colonial resistance movement against the British in India. Early ideologues—influenced by European scholars—claimed Indian civilisational superiority through language (as mother of Indo-European tongues) and race (with Aryan origins). 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 construct a polarising environment conducive for the flourishing of religiously framed identity politics throughout the century. Local Hindu elite across the country formed Hindu Sabhas (Hindu associations) that culminated into the Hindu Mahasabha in 1914, advocating anti-British and anti-Muslim sentiment. The idea of ‘Hindu consciousness’ spread through the circulation of print materials, which instilled notions of national belonging based on Hindu symbols and practices. The spectre of the Muslim as a ‘foreigner’ and ‘invader’ complicit in

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27 Jaffrelot, Hindu Nationalism.
28 Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism.
the colonial project placed Hindu identity in sharp contrast to the Muslim ‘other’, an internal enemy, whilst resisting the British as an external enemy.

From its origin, Hindutva ideologues sought connections with Fascist Italy. During the 1920s, Mussolini’s regime had considerable influence amongst Hindutva ideologues reading in regional newspapers about the transformation of Italian society. The appeal of militarisation in order to instill order in society was considered an attractive alternative to democracy, which was viewed as too close to a British value.29

Such ideas evolved through the ascent of grassroots social movements, namely the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Patriotic Organisation), established in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. Its founding ideological text, Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?, first published in 1923 by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, 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’.30

In 1931, Hedgewar’s mentor, Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, toured Europe and met with Mussolini during a long visit to Italy. Here, 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’ modus operandi. Upon his return to India, Moonje remarked how Hindus should emulate their Italian counterparts.31 To this day, the RSS runs shakhas, or cells, which volunteers join or are recruited into by their local chapters. Each shakha administers physical drill exercises as well as education courses on (selective) ancient Hindu texts. Volunteers are indoctrinated into the Hindutva mission and receive responsibilities such as assisting in social support services to 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 recruitment of Indian students for the purpose of learning

31 Casolari, ‘Hindutva’s foreign tie-up in the 1930s’, 220.
Italian and exposure to fascist propaganda. These transnational ideological and organisational connections persisted with the rise of Nazism in Germany. The *Hindu Mahasabha* openly supported the Third Reich, advocating for an Aryan connection between Nazism and *Hindutva*. Then president of the *Hindu Mahasabha* and close affiliate of the RSS, Savarkar made continuous reference in writings and speeches to Germany’s treatment of the Jewish population as a model for India’s Muslim ‘problem’. In response, the Nazi Party paper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, featured Savarkar’s approval of German occupation.

RSS leader Madhav Sadashiv Golwalker took 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’. Golwalker’s *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (1938) reflects this view:

> The foreign races in Hindu[stan][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, and must loose (sic) 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 preferential treatment—not even citizen’s rights. There is, at least, should be, no other course for them to adopt.

Inspired by Hitler’s actions in Austria and the annexation of the Sudetenland as embodying ‘the true Nation concept’, Golwalker advocated race as fundamental to the Hindu nation. Disciplined nationalism under a superior leader, whereby the nation is a collective unity, led to National Socialism as an attractive model for *Hindutva* ideologues that rejected British individualism. Such racist underpinnings later led Golwalker to withdraw the publication from circulation in 1948, given the negative attention it received as one of the most frequently quoted *Hindutva* texts and its effect on the RSS’ reputation.

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32 Casolari, ‘Hindutva’s foreign tie-up in the 1930s’, 222.
33 Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, 66.
34 Casolari, ‘Hindutva’s foreign tie-up in the 1930s’, 224; D’souza, ‘Nazi propaganda in India’, 89.
36 Casolari, ‘Hindutva’s foreign tie-up in the 1930s’, 224.
38 Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, 60.
In Hindutva, representations of ‘the people’ are thus central towards positioning relational ties between belonging and the imagined community. Described as ‘pure’ and ‘authentic’, the idea of the volk with its Germanic origins can be applied in congruence with Hindutva’s focus on the Aryan past. Inspired by the emergence of race science as a field of inquiry in the colonial academy, as well as Orientalist philosophy, Aryanism developed as a ‘racial theory of Indian civilization’ based on primordialist ideas of evolutionary conceptions of nationalism. The outcome was not simply a direct application of European nationalist thought, but a process of sustained and complex intellectual engagement between colonial India and Europe. Indeed, ‘the Third Reich embraced a range of pagan, esoteric, and Indo-Aryan religious doctrines that buttressed its racial, political, and ideological goals…[with the] 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’. Hindutva as a result is characterised by a continued interest in connecting notions of Arya Dharm, or the ‘Hindu race’, to European conceptualisations of the Aryan ‘race’ as a source of legitimation. Its guiding premise advocates a civilisational superiority based on racial determinants.

By extension, being a Hindu literally equates to Blut und Boden: ‘a “natural” geography and sacred ties of blood’. Hindutva depends on a territorial nation-state and the criteria for belonging is an ethno-religious identity. The nostalgia for a Vedic ‘golden age’ is a guiding myth within the Hindutva narrative. By idolising a golden past that existed prior to the Mughal Empire and British Raj, Hindutva attempts to rewrite a historiographical account contrary to the ‘shame’ of foreign invasion. Grievances of the ‘oppressed’ motivate for a restoration of the Hindu rashtra. Just then as we might conceptualise the reich as authority and sovereignty emanating from the people, rashtra within Hindutva similarly connotes a sacred nation that emanates from indigenous Hindu claims of bounded geography.

Like the Italians, a reciprocity ensued with the aid of German authorities. Nazi agents translated Mein Kampf into Indian languages, as well as conducted covert intelligence operations, radio broadcasts, and

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41 Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism, 3.
44 Zachariah, ‘At the fuzzy edges of fascism’, 653.
distributed pro-Nazi propaganda material to sympathetic press agencies in India.\textsuperscript{45} Hindutva writings circulated in German newspapers in exchange for articles favouring Germany’s Jewish policy in regional Indian newspapers.\textsuperscript{46} Nazi propagandists and German businesses generously funded these newspapers, or they were owned by organisations such as the Hindutva Mahasabha that openly advocated National Socialism for India and a ‘Hindu Fuehrer’.\textsuperscript{47}

At the institutional level, the \textit{Indisches Ausschuss} (India Institute) was founded in 1928 under the parent organisation \textit{Deutsche Akademie}. Between 1929 and 1938, the \textit{Indisches Ausschuss} awarded scholarships to Indian students and funded lektors to teach German to students hoping to travel to Germany. The institute became incorporated into the NSDAP Auslands-Organisation and created Nazi cells in Calcutta, which were active in promoting pro-Nazi propaganda during the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{48} Simultaneously, Indian exiles in Europe conspired with the German government by reporting to informants in India through private correspondences as well as in newspaper articles.\textsuperscript{49}

Although Italian fascists gained more recruits in India, Indo-German connections formed between Indian intellectuals and Nazi ideologues. Benoy Kumar Sarkar was one such figure that became a spokesperson for a range of networks composed of scholars, ideologues, and political activists in right-wing circles, and who was an enthusiast of both Fascism and Nazism.\textsuperscript{50} Intellectual and educator Taraknath Das also engaged in various ideological projects, including National Socialism for a brief period (but favoured Italian Fascist policies as a model for India until the Second World War).\textsuperscript{51} Lastly, Subhas Chandra Bose, a freedom fighter in India’s independence movement, sought allies with Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan during the war, having fled to Berlin in 1941 and founding the \textit{Indische Legion}.\textsuperscript{52, 53}

\textsuperscript{45} D’souza, ‘Nazi propaganda in India’, 78-79.
\textsuperscript{46} Casolari, ‘Hindutva’s foreign tie-up in the 1930s’, 225.
\textsuperscript{47} D’souza, ‘Nazi propaganda in India’, 81-82.
\textsuperscript{48} Zachariah, ‘At the fuzzy edges of fascism’, 647.
\textsuperscript{49} Zachariah, ‘A voluntary gleichschaltung?’, 78.
\textsuperscript{50} Zachariah, ‘At the fuzzy edges of fascism’, 646.
\textsuperscript{51} Maria Framke, ‘Shopping ideologies for independent India? Taraknath Das’s engagement with Italian Fascism and German National Socialism’, \textit{Itinerario}, vol. 40, no. 1, 2016, 55-81.
\textsuperscript{52} Romain Hayes, \textit{Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany: Politics, Intelligence and Propaganda 1941-43} (London: Hurst & Company 2011).
\textsuperscript{53} Bose had long held left-wing beliefs, being involved in radical politics of the Indian National Congress during his youth. Bose sought Axis allies with the primary aim to overthrow British rule on the subcontinent. Thus, Bose’s residence in Germany was fraught with strategic differences with authorities.
It is also worth to describe 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, idolising its ancient civilisation and Hellenism. Portas continued her intellectual journey towards Aryan racial philosophy in India, adopting the name Savitri Devi in pursuit of seeking ‘truth’ in the Hindu ‘homeland’. During the late 1930s, Devi encountered Hindutva individuals and groups, including Moonje, Hedgewar’s RSS, and Savarkar’s Hindu Mahasabha, which greatly influenced her development of the Aryan myth. 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 for creating ‘a sense of shared history, culture, and an awareness of India as one’s Holy Land’. In *A Warning to Hindus* (1939), Devi stressed the achievement of ‘Hindudom’ through a cultivated, unified nationalism rooted in Aryan civilisation. Military resistance and self-defence, she argued, should be employed against the threat of ‘Mohammedanization’. 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 American and British officials for Axis powers during the war. Following the Second World War, Hindutva did not feature in Devi’s life. However, her writings, such as 1958’s *The Lightning and the Sun*, which claimed Hitler to be a reincarnation of the god Vishnu, has continued to inspire neo-Nazi supporters and circles.

Thus, European and South Asian political spheres were interconnected in their engagement(s): ‘The idea of the authenticity of the “folk”, connecting to organicist ideas of community and nation in the twentieth century … the directionality of narratives of travel and absorption of fascist ideas: [was] not from Europe to elsewhere, but multilinear and multilaterally invented’. Fascism and Nazism were not European products available for export, but a continuous cycle of ideological and, at times, mobilised engagement. Hindutva ideologues often incorporated elements of Italian and German

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54 Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler’s Priestess*, 45, 51.
57 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.
58 Zachariah, ‘At the fuzzy edges of fascism’, 641.
59 Similarly, we should look to broader processes of global engagement with various ideologies of mobilisation. The emergence of ‘cosmopolitan thought zones’ in colonial South Asia, for instance, sought to consolidate intellectual transnational configurations of anticolonial resistance beyond 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* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2010).
models that were attractive yet to some extent already present in India. At the same time, intellectuals in Europe engaged with Hindutva ideologues to further ideological developments.

Post-colonial Hindutva

With the withdrawal of the British in 1947, this marked the Partition of the subcontinent into modern day India and Pakistan (and later Bangladesh), into a Hindu-majority and Muslim-majority nation, respectively. Although the RSS avoided taking part in the independence movement struggle in the years prior—likely due to fears of being banned by the British—activists played a major role in the ensuing Hindu-Muslim communal riots of Partition. Whilst Hindu-Muslim communal violence is endemic to India’s history, it was central to the founding of the Indian nation-state, which witnessed the greatest levels of violence prior to, during, and immediately following 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.

Hindutva’s aim to restore Akhand Bharat (Undivided India) is a claim to recover lost territory from the past. Following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, by former RSS member Nathuram Godse who detested Gandhi’s ‘Hindu-Muslim unity’ for ceding to the formation of Pakistan, the RSS was temporarily proscribed as an organisation. Yet, Hindutva actors have justified Godse’s act of violence as an expression of ethno-national claims. Violence has a deep legacy in the European extreme right, in which historically, ‘the street violence that accompanied Fascism’s rise to power served to reinforce the idea that it was about action, not words’. Right-wing extremist movements consequently resort to violent behaviour to project an extreme ideological message that views violence as an acceptable means for their vision of society. ‘Saffron terror’ committed by Hindutva actors, on the other hand, enacts a majoritarian nationalism that is fused with organised violence whereby

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60 Zachariah, ‘A voluntary gleichschaltung?’, 89-91.
62 Davies and Lynch (eds), The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right, 171.
64 A term used to designate Hindutva violence in India.
public space is designated as Hindu space, both physically and in the national imagined community.\textsuperscript{66} Thus, whilst European right-wing extremism is arguably confined to a fringe phenomenon, Hindu\textit{ta} has been visible in nation-building and majoritarian identity in India.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed extensive growth in political activities as the RSS expanded its position as a parent organisation that oversees the Sangh Parivar, or family of organisations in the Hindu\textit{ta} fold.\textsuperscript{67} There are numerous affiliates of the Sangh, ranging from extreme and violent paramilitary groups, including youth wings (e.g. Bajrang Dal), to ‘cultural’ organisations (e.g. Vishwa Hindu Parishad), charity-based NGOs (e.g. Seva Bharati), trade unions (e.g. Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh), farmers’ unions (e.g. Bharatiya Kisan Sangh), and student organisations (e.g. Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad). Female-only organisations (e.g. Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, Sadhvi Shakti Parishad) promote women as heroic mothers and wives/daughters of the nation. These affiliate organisations share the pursuit of Hindu\textit{ta} ideology, often creating local alliances and volunteer networks.

In the 1980s and 1990s, in an attempt to recruit mass support, the Sangh created campaigns with merchandise featuring Hindu symbols, such as stickers and calendars, which became widely popular and visibly connoted Hindu images with Hindu\textit{ta}.\textsuperscript{68} The 1990s additionally witnessed Hindu\textit{ta} actors seeking formal political power in the electoral arena.\textsuperscript{69} It is during this time that Hindu\textit{ta} first came to mainstream prominence as ideologues sought to institutionalize Hindi as the official language of government and push for the revival of Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{70} Similarly, popular culture references, particularly in films,\textsuperscript{71, 72} represented Muslims as a perceived enemy to Hindu majoritarian identity, instilling into public consciousness the relevance of Hindu\textit{ta} tropes and narratives. The rise in lower-middle class support for Hindu\textit{ta} in the 1990s helped cultivate a space for Hindu\textit{ta} actors to tap into this sentiment...

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Oza, ‘The geography of Hindu right-wing violence in India’, 160.
\item Palshikar, ‘The BJP and Hindu nationalism’, 730.
\end{thebibliography}
decades later. Thus, in the 1990s, *Hindutva* was slowly becoming more mainstream, irrespective of the party in central government.

Throughout, the RSS consistently remains the epicentre of the *Hindutva* family as its ideological nucleus. 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’ within civil society; and secondly, functioning with a ‘dual identity’, either with a highly visible, political profile or through voluntary, grassroots services. By embedding the concept of *Hindutva* across different sectors of society through functions and affiliate groups, the RSS uses its umbrella influence in order to conflate the cultural, religious, and political aspects of Hindu identity.

Compared to European right-wing extremism, *Hindutva* in India proliferates at a greater scale. Key to its success is the rise of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP, Indian People’s Party), a manifestation of how *Hindutva* operates in party politics. Although *Sangh* affiliates comprise a broad spectrum of grassroots movements, the BJP is the only organisation that contests elections as a political party. Since its founding, the BJP has been successful at the ballot box with 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* (Indian People’s Party) was founded shortly after independence in 1951 to counter the centre-left, secularist Indian National Congress party. The BJS rejected universalism as promoted by Gandhian ideals of pluralism and diversity, promoting instead ethnic nationalism. 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 accommodate in order to survive elections: either take a moderate stance as a patriotic, populist party,

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75 Kamat and Mathew, ‘Mapping political violence in a globalized world’, 11.
or appeal to a militant sense of aggressive *Hindutva*. The BJS faced an ‘adaptation dilemma’, in which ‘to become accepted by the mainstream, and prevent repression by the state, [right-wing parties] need to moderate, but to satisfy their hard-core members, and to keep a clear profile, they need to stay extreme’.\(^7\) This eventually led to the reformation of the party as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 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’.\(^8\)

Yet, this adaptation dilemma has remained a key tension within BJP operations. In 2002, a key event drew international attention to India: the Gujarat riots, in which Hindu-Muslim violence lasting several weeks resulted in thousands of (overwhelming 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 that describe the violence as a pogrom demonstrate the complicity of state officials, including then BJP Chief Minister Narendra Modi, working 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’.\(^9\) 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, United States, and several European countries for his administration’s involvement in the riots.

Except for a coalition in the national government of 1998-2004, the BJP only succeeded in local and state elections in post-independent India. It once again entered government in 2014, 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 magnetic persona, Modi’s


tactic of attacking the political and media establishment was a strategy to ‘present himself as an aam admi, a common man’\textsuperscript{80} often a “victim” of an elite “news media conspiracy”\textsuperscript{81}. He constructed an image as the voice of the people, as the authentic India. Modi’s spectacular display of a ‘populist zeitgeist’\textsuperscript{82} targeted the incumbent Indian National Congress party for decades of ‘dynastic politics’, invoking a new democratic future promising transparency, accountability, and accessibility.

At the same time, the BJP constructed a ‘civic zeitgeist’\textsuperscript{83} by mobilising along recurring themes of a Muslim ‘threat’ to the Hindu majority, creating a narrative to further Hindu insecurity. 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.\textsuperscript{84} There is likewise an attempt to frame Muslim masculinity through hypersexualised and barbaric tropes (reinforcing Orientalist portrayals), especially against ‘vulnerable’ Hindu women. Claims of ‘love jihad’ (a familiar refrain amongst 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.\textsuperscript{85} The Hindu woman symbolises 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 Rama, are 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.\textsuperscript{86} The masculine pride of Hindutva as a warrior-like figure is embedded within a narrative of survival.

\textsuperscript{81} Paula Chakravarty and Srirupa Roy, ‘Mr. Modi goes to Delhi: mediated populism and the 2014 Indian elections’, Television and New Media, vol. 16, no. 4, 2015, 311-322 (316).
\textsuperscript{82} Mudde, ‘The populist zeitgeist’.
\textsuperscript{84} 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, 88-111.
The BJP not only projected Muslims as an internal enemy, but an external enemy as well. It prominently stoked fear surrounding ‘illegal’ migration from Muslim-majority Bangladeshi labourers—as encouraged by the Congress party—to advance its agenda. Such rhetoric is far from unusual for right-wing extremist parties in the West who have combined anti-establishment populism with a core belief in ethno-nationalist xenophobia. The structural transformations in Europe that emerged from globalisation following the Second World War has been cathartic in furthering right-wing extremism; changes in cultural, linguistic, economic, and political realms resulted in a condition of insecurity and instability in an uncertain world of rampant change. By positioning the loss of industries, employment, cultural lifestyle, and political representation, European right-wing extremist parties respond to a perceived disappearing ethno-national identity. This manifests as opposition to immigration in order to preserve cultural homogeneity and cultural protectionism. The idea that minorities ‘steal’ jobs and disrupt ‘values’, capitalises on an anxiety that views immigrants as a threat to ethno-nationalist identity. Just as right-wing extremist parties in Europe employ a reactionary discourse of ‘us versus them’, seizing upon ethno-national identity as a shared denominator against fear of the unknown (viz., the foreigner), the BJP similarly advocates the preservation of national values from the threat of foreign invasion, in particular, Muslim migrants deemed a threat to these values. Importantly, it is not necessarily that such threats exist to endanger ethno-national identity, but rather, that these threats are perceived. In turn, the centre-left political elite, i.e. Congress party, are targeted for neglecting ‘common’ values of the people.

Throughout the 2014 campaign, Modi subtly integrated Hindutva with citizenship. The candidate maintained ties to Hindu socio-cultural practices by merging Hindu practices and rituals with voting behaviour: ‘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’. By vernacularising the language of Hindutva, ‘nation’ and ‘citizenship’ shifted meaning to include localised narratives conflating Hindu symbols with political demands through an everyday brand of ‘saffron politics’. Such expressions of Modi’s ethno-religiosity constituted a basis of belonging against the corrupt, secular political and media establishment.

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

The political culture of the Hindu middle class is largely imbued with ethno-religious 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.

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, the BJP reached beyond its traditional demographic to a group with rising socio-economic ability in the wake of India’s neoliberal globalisation—the neo-middle class. For the neo-middle class, the BJP, and Modi in particular, represents an opportunity to aspire to upward mobility through simultaneous material achievement and communal identity. This shift in BJP supporters thus reflects how Hindutva can manifest as a fluid ideology that appeals to a wide audience in contemporary India: as a frame for economic neoliberalism, as well as espousing a religio-mythic narrative. This multi-faceted approach ensures a growing, sustainable collective identity that has normalised Hindutva within Indian society.

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92 This is likely due to the fact that the BJP’s founding leadership constituted the elite and intelligentsia.
This ‘mainstreamization’ of Hindutva\textsuperscript{95} can be compared to the ‘mainstreaming’ effect\textsuperscript{96} in the West whereby right-wing extremist views initiated from the margin or fringe is spread to political parties through practices, discourses, and frames. This phenomenon in India resulted in a strategic coalition of religious groups and neo-middle classes, described as a new cultural identitarian political movement that emerged out of a neoliberal political economy.\textsuperscript{97} Thus, whilst Hindutva began to be mainstream in the 1990s, under Modi, Hindutva is arguably more widely accepted across all socio-economic classes in Indian society. Yet, the BJP may be far from becoming a mainstream party for two reasons. First, it cannot dissolve its Hindutva agenda that is salient to a core group of supporters expectant of its implementation in government. Second, the BJP remains in a larger network of Hindutva organisations operating in the political milieu.\textsuperscript{98} Nonetheless, the mainstreaming of Hindutva in India today has allowed for expressions of an exclusionary nationalist discourse previously confined to the fringe.

Under the current Modi government then, what are the implications of Hindutva dominating Indian party politics, 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 for maintaining its electoral success whilst continuing to promote Hindutva as its ideological legacy.\textsuperscript{99} Despite an overt effort not to overemphasise Hindutva, however, the party has thus far failed to take a centrist approach.\textsuperscript{100} In some states, the BJP has implemented a Hindutva agenda within culture and education (e.g. school texts\textsuperscript{101}), as well as cow protection campaigns.\textsuperscript{102} 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

\textsuperscript{98} Palshikar, ‘The BJP and Hindu nationalism’.
\textsuperscript{100} Palshikar, ‘The BJP and Hindu nationalism’, 727.
by running a campaign that seeks to convert Muslim and Christian families “back” to Hinduism.\textsuperscript{103} Censorship of journalists and academics critical of the government is also widespread,\textsuperscript{104} many of whom are subsequently branded as ‘anti-national’. Further, the BJP government has renamed cities, streets, and airports to Hindu figures,\textsuperscript{105} 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’.\textsuperscript{106}

The BJP government has additionally faced controversies around ministry appointments, first with Gajendra Chauhan and later Anupam Kher, as chair of the Governing Council of the Film and Television Institute of India under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Chauhan and Kher’s appointments, both of whom lack necessary professional experience for the role, were viewed as an attempt from the BJP to influence an ideological agenda in official government cinema documentation and education.\textsuperscript{107} But perhaps the most controversial figure in Modi-led BJP is Yogi Adityanath, who was elected Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 2017. A Hindutva hardliner, Adityanath has at times criticised the BJP for diluting Hindutva ideology, whilst inciting calls for violence against Muslims, and making derogatory remarks about women and homosexuality.\textsuperscript{108}

The landslide re-election of Modi and the BJP in 2019, with an even greater majority than 2014, signals that Hindutva is no longer in a process of becoming but is mainstream. In short, it has reached a state of normalcy and legitimacy that is not merely imposed but vastly supported. Hindutva is ultimately the outcome of a sustaining trend in Indian society that will likely persist in the future.

Conclusion

\textsuperscript{103} Palshikar, ‘The BJP and Hindu nationalism’, 728.
\textsuperscript{106} Vanessa Romo, ‘Air India crew directed to “Hail the Motherland” after every announcement’, available on the NPR website at https://www.npr.org/2019/03/05/700512781/air-india-crews-directed-to-hail-the-motherland-after-every-announcement (viewed 23 May 2019).
\textsuperscript{107} Not unwarranted considering parallels with the making of Leni Riefenstahl’s film Olympia of the Berlin Olympics in 1936.
This article fills a lacuna in the field of right-wing extremism scholarship by situating the ideological, historical, and organisational dimensions of Hindutva. It begins by highlighting a theoretical and empirical gap in studies of right-wing extremism as largely limited to European/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 centred on religion, when it is instead how religion is politicised such that being a Hindu equates belonging to an ethno-nationalist identity. On the other hand, South Asian scholars tend to analyse Hindutva as an isolated case, rarely drawing beyond regional studies for comparison.

From this basis, this article presents Hindutva in an attempt towards creating universal dimensions of right-wing extremism. It does not disregard the circumstantial origin, evolution, and adaptation of Hindutva, but illustrates this development as mutually interconnected through transnational entanglements with Italian Fascism and German Nazism. Whilst Hindutva ideologues incorporated elements of European extreme right models for its modus operandi, intellectuals in Europe engaged with Hindutva actors to further ideological developments. By situating Hindutva in conjunction with the European context, transgressing this geographical boundary enhances the discussion surrounding the transnational nature of right-wing extremist ideology. Ideological, and at times, physical connections occurred within a continuous cycle of mobilised engagement between European and South Asian political milieux.

Following India’s independence, the scale of communal riots that ushered in the founding of India as a Hindu-majority nation and Pakistan as a Muslim-majority nation, led Hindutva actors to justify violence as an ethno-national claim for Akhand Bharat (Undivided India) in order to recover lost territory. As such, violence against the threat of ‘otherness’ became a legitimate means of preserving the ‘motherland’. The evolution of Hindutva in post-colonial India parallels European theories of ethno-nationalism (i.e. 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 into Hinduism. In European countries, the evolution of right-wing extremism post-Second World War has similarly relied upon defining an ‘other’, primarily through racialisation of difference. By projecting individual subjectivity onto the national imaginary as a boundary of exclusion against fear of the unknown ‘foreign’ entity, 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 a fringe phenomenon, *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 party politics by showcasing the emergence of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), the only political party with *Hindutva* as its official slogan. The ‘adaptation dilemma’ of the BJP has not been without its pitfalls, however, as evident with the 2002 Gujarat riots, which revealed how state sponsored violence during the riots 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 galvanised mass support amongst the Indian populace by presenting 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 fear of the ‘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 conceptualise right-wing extremism in its transnational manifestations. In a time in which right-wing extremism exists as a contemporary phenomenon within Western societies whilst also as a growing force in the world’s largest (post-colonial) democracy, such theoretical intervention is timely given the current wave of global right-wing extremism.
Article

Immigrant, Nationalist and Proud: A Twitter Analysis of Indian Diaspora Supporters for Brexit and Trump

Eviane Cheng Leidig

Center for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo, 0317 Oslo, Norway; E-Mail: eviane.leidig@c-rex.uio.no

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Abstract

The Brexit referendum to leave the EU and Trump’s success in the US general election in 2016 sparked new waves of discussion on nativism, nationalism, and the far right. Within these analyses, however, very little attention has been devoted towards exploring the transnational ideological circulation of Islamophobia and anti-establishment sentiment, especially amongst diaspora and migrant networks. This article thus explores the role of the Indian diaspora as mediators in populist radical right discourse in the West. During the Brexit referendum and Trump’s election and presidency, a number of Indian diaspora voices took to Twitter to express pro-Brexit and pro-Trump views. This article presents a year-long qualitative study of these users. It highlights how these diasporic Indians interact and engage on Twitter in order to signal belonging on multiple levels: as individuals, as an imaginary collective non-Muslim diaspora, and as members of (populist radical right) Twitter society. By analysing these users’ social media performativity, we obtain insight into how social media spaces may help construct ethnic and (trans)national identities according to boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. This article demonstrates how some Indian diaspora individuals are embedded into exclusivist national political agendas of the populist radical right in Western societies.

Keywords

Brexit; diaspora; Indian; integration; multiculturalism; populism; radical right; Trump; Twitter

Issue

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1. Introduction

This article explores the role of British and American-based Indian diaspora supporters for Brexit and Trump. It begins by introducing how the Brexit referendum to leave the European Union and Trump’s campaign and presidency in the US (both which at times deliberately targeted the Indian diaspora) utilised populist radical right rhetoric to galvanise support on social media. In response, the emergence of pro-Brexit and pro-Trump social media movements based on identitarian membership, such as ‘Sikhs for Britain’ and ‘Hindus for Trump’, as well as the establishment of advocacy organisations such as the Republican Hindu Coalition in the US which openly supported Trump’s candidacy, reveals some diasporic Indians as proponents of populist radical right ideas.

One legacy of Indian diaspora political mobilisation in the West is largely based on Hindutva (or Hindu nationalism), an ideology that promotes the superiority of Hindu civilisation from the threat of Islam and Muslim ‘invasion’. Hindutva resonates amongst a diaspora keen to preserve their Hindu identity by cultivating a long-distance nationalism that foregrounds belonging ‘back home’ whilst still creating a sense of collective identity amongst diaspora communities in the West. Sikh and Christian Indian diaspora groups have likewise successfully mobilised in community building efforts that aim to highlight their religious identities in Western multicultural societies. Consequently, non-Muslim Indian diaspora activism has attempted to distinguish a boundary against the Muslim ‘other’, building on Islamophobic anxiety prevalent in a post-9/11 era. This article thus posits that anti-Muslim
anxiety, and anti-establishment sentiment (who are held accountable for pro-Muslim policies), are core issues that motivate such Indian diaspora communities to support populist radical right agendas.

Following a year-long qualitative study of Indian diaspora Twitter users who express pro-Brexit and pro-Trump views, this article highlights their engagement in political discourse within the Brexit and Trump Twitter-sphere(s). Their interactions help (re)produce key issues and rhetoric within the populist radical right online milieu. Importantly, these users incorporate an ‘integration’ narrative to justify their positioning as ‘good immigrants’ in Western societies (as opposed to non-‘integration’ tendencies of Muslims). By doing so, these diasporic Indians provide insight into how online spaces may help construct meanings of ethnic and (trans)national identities according to boundaries of inclusion/exclusion.

This article highlights online Indian diaspora supporters for Brexit and Trump by situating their expressions of Islamophobia and anti-establishment sentiment in order to embed themselves within the populist radical right agenda of exclusionary nationalism in Western societies. By illuminating what may be assumed as paradoxical political views of an ethnic minority demographic, this article contributes towards understanding and explaining their support for populist radical right ideology in the West.


Ideologically, the populist radical right promotes a combination of ethno-nationalism, xenophobia expressed as cultural racism, and anti-establishment populism (Rydgren, 2005, 2017). National identity is conflated with a distinct cultural identity rooted in an ethnic past; the populist radical right seeks to ‘preserve’ national culture by keeping separate different cultures, i.e., ethno-pluralism. The contemporary threat of ethno-pluralism is the apprehension that Islam—and consequently, Muslims—is the fundamental ‘other’ in Western societies. Therefore, the populist radical right holds “a visceral opposition to, and demonization of Islam” and consequently, “immigrants from Muslim countries”, whom are viewed as threatening to national values (Kallis, 2015, p. 28; Rydgren, 2007, p. 244) in the post-9/11 era. The populist radical right criticises the ‘elite’ political and media establishment for failing to adequately resolve issues such as integration, immigration, and (ethno-)national identity, using Islam as a placeholder to articulate these grievances.

Whilst demand and supply factors help explain the emergence and success of the populist radical right, including political opportunities and increasing discontent and disaffection with governing institutions and parties, the role of mass media is also key in disseminating populist radical right discourses and agendas towards a wider audience (Kallis, 2013; Rydgren, 2005). The transnational diffusion of ideas and practices made possible through media and communication technologies reflects a pivotal shift in populist radical right platforms. The effect is a growing global wave that has taken root across numerous locales:

[5]Strong points of ideological and political convergence have started to crystallize, turning the radical right into a truly transnational European and occasionally trans-Atlantic force...The topicality of a new range of issues, such as immigration, international terrorism, national sovereignty, globalization...have created a political milieu that has allowed the radical right not only to thrive but also to unite its otherwise disparate and fragmented forces. (Kallis, 2015, p. 28)

This noteworthy phenomenon describes the appeal, and at times, success, of populist radical right movements and parties. In the case of the UK Independence Party (UKIP)-backed Brexit campaign and Trump’s election and presidency, both presented issues that resonated with similar demographics, but delivered them according to local narratives.

During the 2016 referendum campaign for Britain’s membership in the EU, UKIP seized the opportunity to combine its Eurosceptic platform with disdain for Westminster. UKIP took a tactical approach by attacking the establishment for failing to address issues of immigration and integration—escalated by sensational media coverage of the refugee crisis. Indeed, then UKIP leader Nigel Farage “blamed state multiculturalism for the rise of home-grown terrorism in Europe” (Kallis, 2015, pp. 34–35), citing the metropolitan elite for enacting policies that created ‘parallel lives’ and hence, Islamist extremism within communities. In doing so, UKIP portrayed Muslims as a ‘fifth column’ within British society who were a threat to national security, but more importantly, national culture. By linking potential extremist activity of future refugees to past integration policy failures, UKIP promoted a discourse of fear in the present. Given UKIP’s stance as the party which claimed issue ownership on immigration (see Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017), its referendum rhetoric built on pre-existing anxieties surrounding uncontrolled borders.

During the campaign, UKIP employed an extensive social media strategy for Vote Leave. The party significantly used Twitter’s infrastructure as an avenue to garner support for Brexit, including the ability to broadcast the party’s platform to users instead of the mainstream media; setting the discursive framing of the Leave camp; building on previous Eurosceptic movements to create a broader coalition; and providing the appearance of democratic representation in the political realm. Yet, there was “substantial focus on mobi-
lization of existing supporters, rather than converting new ones” (Usherwood & Wright, 2017, p. 380). Pro-Brexit Twitter users engaged in diffusing information to ideologically similar users, thus creating online “polarized in-groups” as had also occurred in the 2015 general campaign (Segesten & Bossetta, 2016, pp. 14–15). This phenomenon reflects what are termed “ideological cyberghettoes” (Lilleker & Kok-Michalska, 2017, p. 4) or “homogeneous affective echo chambers” in which individuals selectively expose themselves to sources that reinforce their political opinions (Himmelboim et al., 2016, p. 1395). The extensive use of Twitter bots by the pro-Brexit side additionally helped generate targeted content (Howard & Kollanyi, 2016). In short, UKIP exercised an impressive social media strategy during the EU referendum that helped ensure its populist radical right message had reached an intended audience.

With parallels in rhetoric and strategy to the UKIP-backed Vote Leave campaign (Wilson, 2017), Trump’s campaign likewise galvanised support employing a populist radical right narrative throughout the US national election the same year. Whilst a majority of Trump’s policy proposals were not radical, the campaign’s rhetoric was outwardly hostile towards governing political institutions (Eiermann, 2016). In a study of Trump’s Twitter following, for example, Wang, Niemi, Li and Hu (2016) found that attacks on the Democrats (i.e., the incumbent political party) received the most “likes”; in short, anti-establishment sentiment was a motivating factor for Trump supporters who were largely disaffected with the governing status quo. Further, Trump’s use of informal, direct, and provocative language on Twitter helped construct and normalise the image of a homogenous nation threatened by the dangerous ‘other’ (Kreis, 2017). More research on the Trump campaign’s social media strategy is needed in order to effectively evaluate the extent of online support for populist radical right discourse, although it has been noted how Trump disrupted the norms of election campaigning on social media (Enli, 2017).

3. A New, Growing Base?

It seems paradoxical (and rare) that ethnic minorities and/or immigrants would support populist radical right platforms. As such, there exists very little research on these supporters. Two exceptions are case studies in Sweden and the Netherlands.

The Sweden Democrats (SD) is an ethno-nationalist party with roots in Swedish fascism. Pettersson, Liebkind, and Sakki (2016) found that ethnic minority and/or immigrant SD politicians had complex, fluid, and multifaceted identity constructions. Often revealed was a “discursive tension between an assigned immigrant or ethnic minority identity on the one hand, and an asserted Swedish identity on the other” (Pettersson et al., 2016, p. 637).

By presenting themselves as a ‘good immigrant,’ these politicians reinforced the narrative that immigrants need only to work hard to succeed and will ultimately be accepted in society. As such, ‘elite’ liberals were viewed as pandering to immigrants who are assumed to “not think for themselves” and who are, importantly, non-national (Pettersson et al., 2016, pp. 637–638). Muliniari and Neergaard (2018) similarly found that migrant activists in the SD describe individual stories of hard work as a means of successful integration, as opposed to assumed cultural differences or unwillingness of new migrants to assimilate into Swedish culture. Combined with this narrative was opposition to Islam that feared new migrants of Muslim background would create “enclave societies” and foster the “Islamisation of Sweden” (Muliniari & Neergaard, 2018, p. 14).

In the Netherlands, Roopram and van Steenbergen (2014) analysed Hindustani2 voters of the Freedom Party (PVV), a populist radical right party with a strong anti-immigration and anti-Islam platform. Whilst some Hindustani PVV voters promoted a “work ethos” discourse citing concerns of immigration as an economic burden on the welfare state, others feared Islam as a cultural threat to the Netherlands (Roopram & van Steenbergen, 2014, pp. 56–57). The latter spoke of Islamist radicalisation and extremism, connecting historical and cultural narratives of past Muslim rule in India to the contemporary threat of “Islamization” of Dutch society (Roopram & van Steenbergen, 2014, pp. 55–56). This is key as it signals how global Islamophobic tropes can operate and adapt to local contexts, and ultimately, bolster support for populist radical right ideology in the West.

If we are to consider how the SD and PVV appeal to ethnic minorities and/or immigrants, then such insight might also apply to pro-Brexit and pro-Trump Indian diaspora supporters. Islamophobic and anti-establishment views promoted by the Vote Leave campaign and Trump’s campaign and presidency likely resonated with some diasporic Indians3. Yet, the articulation of populist radical right ideas amongst the diaspora is grounded within a historical legacy of anti-Muslim sentiment. The next section highlights the evolution of Indian diaspora political mobilisation in the UK and US as framed according to non-Muslim identity building.

4. Building a Minority Identity

The performance of diasporic identity is a way of simultaneously constructing imaginaries of the homeland and of creating a minority identity outside India. For many within the Indian diaspora, the formation of a minority identity in Western societies is construed along religious lines as reflected in the historical and contemporary politics of nation-building on the subcontinent. Although political mobilisation and activism of Hindu, Sikh, and

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2 Hindustani refers to Hindus, Muslims, and Christians who migrated as indentured labourers from India to Suriname, and then to the Netherlands.

3 Based on polling data, 33% of British South Asians voted for Brexit in 2016 (Ashcroft Polls) and 16% of Indian Americans voted for Trump in the US national election (National Asian American Survey).
Christian communities in the West has alleviated these religious tensions carried over with the diaspora, one issue remains stark in the post-9/11 era: their distinct framing as non-Muslim religious identities.

Hindutva (or Hindu nationalism) ideology and its organisations have a historical legacy amongst the Hindu diaspora in the UK, US, Canada, the Caribbean, and eastern and southern Africa (Bhatt & Mukta, 2000, p. 435).\(^4\) While joining in Hindutva activities is a way of building socio-cultural capital with others (Mathew & Prashad, 2000, p. 524), it more importantly provides comfort to a diaspora seeking to define itself in the West (see Bhatt, 2000). The demand from migrants to educate their children in Hindu traditions (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007) reflects an attempt to reconnect with the ‘culture’ of ‘back home’. Hindutva organisations seize upon this opportunity to present a version of Hinduism that can accommodate the diasporic experience.

The shift to multiculturalism as a policy agenda in the West has had a profound impact on diasporic Hindutva organisations, whether serving as ethnic lobbies in party politics, or adopting a human rights discourse in terms of a victimhood narrative (Bhatt, 2000, p. 580; Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007; Kamat & Mathew, 2003; Therwath, 2012; Zavos, 2010, p. 12). In the UK, these organisations regularly feature in British government policies related to diversity, multiculturalism, and community cohesins the name of religious and cultural plurality (Zavos, 2010, p. 18). Self-described umbrella organisations campaign on issues of Hindu representation in the public sphere, thereby institutionalising (and essentialising) Hindu identity (see Anderson, 2015). In post-9/11 America, Hindutva manifests as a religious lobby to policy makers and legislators, as Hindu advocacy organisations frame their agendas according to US national interest. They distance themselves from the Muslim ‘other’ and exploit anti-Islam sentiments whilst simultaneously proclaim its critics as “Hinduophobic” (Kurien, 2006, 2016). Diasporic Hindutva becomes a mediator of transnational ideological manifestations of anti-Muslim anxiety, albeit adapted to local contexts. It is thus the outcome of a highly politicised agenda that combines transnational and multicultural identity politics.

In addition to diasporic Hindutva, Sikh and Christian diasporas have also played a prominent role in political mobilisation in the West. Of relevance is the rise of some Sikh activism surrounding the narrative of Muslim grooming gangs in the UK, which allegedly target Sikh girls for conversion to Islam (Singh, 2017). For these Sikhs, such cases “often feeds on existing historical narratives and contemporary Sikh/Muslim tensions” which reinforce Muslims as a threat to non-Muslim communities in Western societies (Singh, 2017, p. 6). Indeed, the issue of Muslim grooming gangs (further explored below), has created alliances between diasporic Sikhs, Christians, and Hindus, with counter-jihad organisations such as the English Defence League, to promote an anti-Muslim agenda (Lane, 2012). In a move towards populist radical right support, such ideological connections have expanded to include issues such as immigration. In Thorleifsson’s (2016) research amongst British Sikh Brexiteers, for example, support for restrictive immigration policies was articulated in order to maintain historic Anglo-Indian links. In the context of the Brexit referendum, not only (dominantly Muslim) migrants from the refugee crisis, but Eastern European migrants from the EU were viewed as not ‘culturally’ belonging to Britain’s national imagined community. Here, British Sikhs evoked a nostalgia for Commonwealth and empire that they perceived as an entitlement for immigrant status.

A lacuna remains in how some diasporic Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians, united by the othering of Islam/Muslims as an approach to integration, translates into support for populist radical right agendas. The following sections details a year-long qualitative study of Indian diaspora Twitter users who express support for Brexit and Trump. It posits that anti-Muslim anxiety and anti-establishment sentiment are core issues that motivate such users.

5. Methodology

Unlike a large number of studies conducted on Twitter that mainly incorporate a quantitative approach with data collection (Ampono, Anstead, & O’Loughlin, 2011; Barbera & Rivero, 2014; Freelon & Karpef, 2014; Froio & Ganesh, 2018; Hartung, Klinger, Schmidtke, & Vogel, 2017; for an exception see Tromble, 2016), this article focuses on a qualitative design that aims to capture the nature of Twitter activity and interactions of users. Thirty-nine Twitter account users were manually chosen of diasporic Indians living in the UK and US who express pro-Brexit and/or pro-Trump political opinions, whether in the form of tweeting original content, retweets, and/or replies to other users. Data collection included diasporic Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians as a way of empirically demonstrating expressions of anti-Muslim Indian identity in the West. At times, Sikh and Christian diaspora users did express disdain for Hindutva, but these users distinguished themselves by explicitly asserting a non-Muslim identity. Their deliberate discursive identification reveals how individuals in the Indian diaspora choose to actively distance themselves from Muslims. Hence, these Hindu, Sikh, and Christian Indian diaspora users help reconstruct the myth of Muslim ‘otherness’ in an effort to politically integrate in Western societies.

The location of accounts collected was determined by listed profile information and/or tweets that originated with British or American content which signaled deeper familiarity of local issues (this ran the risk of assuming knowledge was linked to place of residence). What was certain was that accounts had to contain po-

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itical content that favoured Brexit (not exclusively UKIP) and/or Trump (not exclusively Republican). Although a small number of users tweeted solely about Brexit or Trump, a large majority of accounts contained overlapping material of both. (If accounts additionally tweeted Hindutva material this was a bonus, but not a necessary condition, especially considering that Sikh and Christian users were also analysed in the sample.) By exploring users who tweet simultaneously about Brexit and Trump, this allowed for a convergent rather than a comparative analysis at a transnational scale.

Lastly, account users were both individuals and organisations, although a majority belonged to the former. Some accounts belonged to leaders, activists, or advocates, whilst others to non-affiliated individuals. The number of followers or levels of tweeting activity were not as significant as much as participating, i.e., producing content, in the pro-Brexit and pro-Trump Twitter network. The rationale for this selection was to determine how users perform their online political identities. Accounts that had never tweeted, however, were disregarded for the sample. Over time, some account users did change privacy settings to protected tweets and data collection of users ceased unless tweets were made public again. Others had changed Twitter handles or to entirely new accounts, making it difficult to track accounts at times.

Table 1 details the type of user accounts, for which two and seven are organisations in the UK and US, and thirteen and seventeen belong to individuals, respectively. The number of tweets for each account type is given rounded to the nearest thousandth, as is the number of followers⁵.

We can already note two characteristics of users. Firstly, a majority of account users comprise of individuals rather than organisations. Second, individuals tweet at a greater frequency than organisations, despite a majority with less than 5,000 followers (yet, it is only individual accounts that have more than 10,000 followers). Based on these characteristics, we can infer that although organisations serve as mobilising agents, it is clearly individuals that act as mobilisers in the Twittersphere. The findings discussed below indicate how these individuals establish an online presence which moves beyond quantitative impact, towards performing a discursive political identity.

From April 2017 to April 2018, NVivo’s NCapture software was used to scrape entire timelines of the selected Twitter accounts, providing the first to most recent tweet of each user. Scrapes were downloaded every two weeks and analysed within four chronological phases, with phase I including tweets collected from April 2017 to July 2017, phase II from July 2017 to October 2017, phase III from October 2017 to January 2018, and phase IV from January 2018 to April 2018. By allowing for a longitudinal study to prevent bias from data collection during one phase, analysing the data according to phases allowed to observe shifts, if any, in issue salience over time.

6. Findings

6.1. Employing Populist Radical Right Discourse

Utilising NVivo software tools, the word frequency of tweets was extracted, inclusive of stemmed words, e.g., ‘vote’ and ‘voting’. Figures 1 to 4, reflective of each phase, display a word cloud generated by NVivo of the most commonly used words in tweets.

Clearly, the word ‘Trump’ (as well as the president’s Twitter handle) was the most frequent word within the tweet collection across all phases. Other frequent words included: ‘people’, ‘vote’, ‘Clinton’, ‘Obama’, ‘Muslim’, ‘election’, ‘Islam’, ‘media’, ‘liberal’, etc. Visualising word frequency shifted in relation to current political events during the Brexit referendum and subsequent negotiations, as well as Trump’s campaign and administration. However, as indicated in the figures, word usage tended to remain consistent across all phases. This repetition of language is key as it reflects how users choose to display themselves according to what Papacharissi (2011) describes as “a networked self”, whereby users construct a self-identity within “converged mediated environments” (p. 309) such as Twitter. Twitter becomes:

A sense of place...formed in response to the particular sense of self, or in response to the identity performance constructed upon that place. This presents the modus operandi for the networked self, and the con-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Account</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Tweets</th>
<th>Followers*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>0–1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *5 accounts (1 organisation and 4 individuals) were deleted in the period following data collection and the collation of the table. The number of followers for these accounts is unknown.

⁵ To protect anonymity of account users.
Figure 1. Phase I: April 2017 to July 2017.

Figure 2. Phase II: July 2017 to October 2017.

Figure 3. Phase III: October 2017 to January 2018.
text of newer patterns of sociability and routes to sociability that emerge. (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 317)

Here, we can see that users continue to perform a particular identity over time by engaging in a discourse—or “a semiotic that affords connection” (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 317)—as constituted within a Twitter community.

In order to explore how certain words were used in context, however, five themes reflective of populist radical right discourse (as discussed in Section 2), and speculated issues of concern for Indian diaspora users living in the UK and US were selected. These five themes—that were further categorised by subtheme—include: 1) ‘immigration’ (including the subthemes ‘illegal’; ‘refugee’; ‘rape’; ‘multiculturalism’); 2) ‘foreign policy’ (including the subthemes ‘EU’; ‘India’ and/or ‘Modi’6 and/or ‘BJP’); 3) ‘establishment’ (including the subthemes ‘Clinton’; ‘Obama’; ‘Democrats’; ‘Labour’; ‘liberal’ and/or ‘left’; ‘media’ and/or ‘BBC’ and/or ‘CNN’); 4) ‘Islam’ (including the subthemes ‘Muslim’; ‘terrorism’ and/or ‘extremism’; ‘ISIS’); and 5) ‘Indian’ (including the subtheme ‘Hindu’). Rather than employing NVivo software to algorithmically determine themes (i.e., codes), the coding scheme was inductively developed by assessing tweets in the preliminary stage of data collection. Given that users tweeted about local political context and/or issues, e.g., refugee crisis in Europe or CNN coverage of Trump, a qualitative coding manual was created to reflect users’ topical interests. Instead of coding all the topics discussed by users, codes pertained to populist radical right discourse; the exceptions were tweets discussing ‘India’/‘Modi’/‘BJP’, as this indicated awareness of Indian politics, and tweets including ‘Indian’/‘Hindu’ as markers of ethnic identity. Tweets were coded to one or more themes/subthemes, depending on the content of the tweet. Throughout a year of data collection, a total of 185,580 English-language tweets were manually coded.

To examine the nature of the relationship between themes, a NVivo-generated cluster analysis as displayed in Figures 5 to 8 provides a visual representation of themes/codes clustered together based on words in common. NVivo generates a cluster analysis of word similarity using the Pearson correlation coefficient as a metric. The result is a diagram that clusters codes together if they have many words in common. In short, Figures 5 to 8 show that themes which share a branch contain the same words as used in tweets. By conducting a cluster analysis for each phase, we can again observe how conversations shift over a year, but now relating to themes.

Based on the cluster analysis in Figure 5, we can infer, for example, that the theme of ‘multiculturalism’ is frequently used in tweets referencing the British Labour party, as well as the role of the ‘BBC’ and the ‘EU’ in relation to ‘Labour’. In Figure 6, this shifts to include the ‘establishment’. This is likely due to the policy mandate of the centre-left political and media establishment on multiculturalism, and subsequently how critics place blame on its failure. In Figure 7, however, tweets about ‘multiculturalism’ and the ‘establishment’ shifts towards conversations focusing on ‘ISIS’, ‘refugees’, ‘Islam’, ‘terrorism/extremism’, ‘Muslim’, and ‘rape’. This indicates that no longer is a single political party being targeted, but all mainstream political parties which are designated as the ‘establishment’. Additionally, anti-Muslim sentiment becomes the primary articulation for criticism of multiculturalism. But, in Figure 8, ‘establishment’ disappears and once again, ‘BBC’, ‘EU’, and ‘Labour’ are prominently featured within tweets, only this time in relation to Islamophobic discourse. Thus, the centre-left political and

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6 Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India.

7 The Bharatiya Janata Party, a Hindu nationalist political party, which is the ruling party in India led by Modi.
Figure 5. Phase I: April 2017 to July 2017.

Figure 6. Phase II: July 2017 to October 2017.
Figure 7. Phase III: October 2017 to January 2018.

Figure 8. Phase IV: January 2018 to April 2018.
media establishment remains over time the primary opposition for these Indian diaspora users, who are in turn reinforcing populist radical right ideology.

Similarly, ‘left/liberal’ is often initially referenced in tweets that also discuss ‘Islam’ and ‘terrorism/extremism’, which in turn, is also related to the branch of tweets that reference ‘refugee’, ‘Muslim’, and ‘rape’. But again, this shifts after six months as ‘left/liberal’ is then used almost exclusively in tweets that refer to ‘Democrats’, ‘Clinton’, and ‘Obama’ for the last two phases. This change is due to a surge in Twitter activity as the Trump administration increasingly targets the Democratic Party for opposing policy changes.

The relationship between these branches of tweets thus highlight not only how certain populist radical right narratives circulate in online conversations, but also how these conversations shifted over a year-long period in response to current events. Tracing conversation dynamics amongst users provides insight into how their articulation of populist radical right discourse adapts to wider socio-political conditions. Although all tweets were analysed combining UK and US-based accounts—that is, convergently rather than comparatively—these two examples of themes highlighted above indicate country-specific nomenclature. ‘Multiculturalism’ remains primarily a British term, likely due to its popular usage in the UK context, as opposed to ‘diversity’ as is common in American parlance. Similarly, the ‘left/liberal’ theme signals greater usage in US-based tweets, given the greater propensity to identify Democrats as liberals (vis-à-vis Republicans as conservatives) in American popular understanding of the liberal/conservative dichotomy. This is not to suggest all tweets within these two themes fall neatly within national boundaries, however, but serves as an indication based on volume. What is apparent is that anti-Muslim anxiety becomes a continuous refrain within both themes, thus suggesting how these users understand ‘multiculturalism’ and the ‘left/liberals’ in relation to fear of Islam/Muslims. The effect is a transnationalisation of anti-Muslim anxiety as a recurring trope.

Like the word clouds, the cluster analyses provide visual representation of the tweets at a general scale to show the relationship between themes. Repetition once again appears as a trend (e.g., anti-Muslim sentiment), as the cluster analyses indicate that word similarity generally remains consistent between themes, with slight changes taking place over a year’s duration. As such, we can infer that these users tend to hold stable political attitudes in line with populist radical right ideology. The following section explores tweets of the ‘Muslim’ theme in depth in order to provide insight into how these users conceptualise the notion of ‘integration’ through online discursive performativity.

6.2. A Case of ‘Love Jihad’

By coding tweets according to word usage in conversation, this explores how these Indian diaspora users participate within Twittersphere culture and community. But in order to situate conversation dynamics within themes, this allows us to look in-depth at how issues are framed in tweets. In tweets coded to the ‘Muslim’ theme, for instance, Muslims are often characterised as violent, especially with the aim to cause “destruction” in the UK, US, and/or Europe more generally. Links to ISIS or terrorist activity is frequently cited as a major concern (as indicated in the cluster analyses above). Similarly, Muslims are described as a “cancer” in relation to Islam as a “poisonous ideology”. Further references to Islam include describing the Prophet Mohammed as a pedophile and rapist, and consequently, Western women as targets of “rape” or “sex slaves” by Muslims continuing Islamic practice. Tweets also frequently describe Muslims in reference to immigration. Portrayed as “cockroaches”, Muslims are seen as invaders constantly “breeding” in order to destruct Western/European “civilization”. Consequently, they are viewed as foreigners who must be deported. Following this line of logic, then, tweets usually criticise the left (or “libtards”) and the media (or “prestitutes”) for their failure to see Muslims along these tropes. Depicting Muslims according to these negative representations fits into the populist radical right narrative. By dehumanising Muslims as violent terrorists or ‘criminals’, this reinforces an ‘otherness’ that is foundational towards the ideological projection of exclusionary nationalism. Here, these Indian diaspora Twitter users are consciously embodying an image of non-Muslimness in order to assert claims of national belonging.

Indeed, these Indian diaspora Twitter users choose to emphasise a non-Muslim Indian identity in order to differentiate themselves from Muslims. Users often describe instances of “love jihad” in which not only white Western young women, but also Hindu, Sikh, and Christian girls are targeted by Muslim grooming gangs. For instance, Rohan, a young British man of Hindu background, tweets:

“Horrible sexual grooming of Hindu girls in UK.”

A website link in Rohan’s tweet emphasises that the perpetrators of these grooming—or “rape”—gangs are young Muslim men who have also targeted Hindu diaspora girls. Similarly, another user, Sikhs for Britain, tweets:

“A Sikh group wants politicians to stop describing the Rotherham grooming gang as ‘Asian’.”

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8 Words in double quotation marks are direct usage as they appear across a majority of tweets. However, personal identifying information has not been revealed and/or disclosed in the findings. Twitter user handles have been changed to protect anonymity, unless the account is managed by an organisation. Similarly, any quoted tweets have been changed from the original, but still reflect the meaning of content, unless the tweet has been deleted by the user in which case the original is quoted. Such alterations are necessary to ensure ethical compliance according to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.
Here, Sikhs for Britain refers to the Rotherham grooming scandal in the UK, in which a group of British Pakistani men had been targeting young girls for sexual exploitation. This tweet highlights the need to distinguish the perpetrators’ religious background (i.e., Muslim) as the rationale for their actions.

Hence, these non-Muslim Indian diaspora users fear being misidentified as Muslim in the West. They push to be recognized for their religious identity and not an all-encompassing ‘Asian’ descriptor. Such tweets are used to justify Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity as religions that dictate respect for law and order, tolerance, and peace. The consequent representation is that Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians—as opposed to Muslims who are instinctively intolerant and violent—are well-integrated in Western societies.

Further, many tweets on this issue target the political and media establishment with claims of Muslim “appeasement” rather than protecting “innocent” Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians. Jasjit, a Sikh activist in the UK, tweets:

“Evidence that public officials withheld information of sexual grooming to protect liberalism.”

By presupposing that government officials have a leftist agenda that prevents transparency on the issue of grooming gangs, Jasjit reinforces a populist radical right discourse of anti-establishment sentiment. Other users also express this worldview. Rohan further tweets:

“The left clearly don’t give a s**t about organised Muslim child grooming gangs targeting non-Muslim children.”

Arjun, a young man of Hindu ancestry that converted to Christianity, similarly tweets:

“Wow, lefty white racist lady on Twitter calls me uncivilized for having an opinion on Muslim grooming gangs.”

Lastly, Chetan, a young British Hindu, tweets:

“Grooming gangs prosper under political correctness.”

By denoting the political orientation of the establishment as left-leaning, this serves as the basis for government officials to fail to address grooming gangs. Using terms such as ‘political correctness’ serves to augment the notion that multiculturalism policies promoted by the establishment have failed to address the concerns of non-Muslim Indian diaspora communities who feel victimized but are largely ignored in the public conversation.

Twitter serves as a site for these Indian diaspora users to create a networked self, one simultaneously built by fusing digitally networked action with personal action frames. An opportunity arises on Twitter “in which new public spaces opened up by media technologies are spaces with an implicit potential to frame vigorous, ‘bottom up’ trajectories of autonomous action accompanied by a strong sense of moral legitimacy” (Zavos, 2015, p. 22). Tweeting about Muslim grooming gangs targeting Hindu, Sikh, and Christian diaspora girls provides these users “a strong sense of moral legitimacy” given what they view as the failure of the political and media establishment to protect victims of abuse. By highlighting intercommunity tensions within the diaspora, these users reinforce the populist radical right narrative that Muslims will never be able to fully ‘integrate’ due to their fundamental ‘otherness’. Consequently, these users cultivate their own sense of identity and belonging on multiple levels: as individuals, as part of a collective non-Muslim Indian diaspora, and as members of (populist radical right) Twitter society.

7. Conclusion

This article highlights those in the Indian diaspora who promote exclusionary nationalist political agendas in Western, multicultural societies. It begins by situating how the UKIP-backed Vote Leave campaign in the Brexit referendum and Trump’s election in 2016 advanced populist radical right discourse—in particular immigration and integration—on Twitter as a strategy to target intended audiences. Populist radical right discourse might alienate ethnic minorities and/or immigrants, yet, case studies in Sweden (with the SD) and the Netherlands (with the PVV) reveal that such supporters do exist to promote these platforms. In particular, the ‘good immigrant’ myth of ‘integration’ remains a constant refrain amongst supporters. Given previous, albeit limited, research on this phenomenon, such insight might apply to pro-Brexit and pro-Trump Indian diaspora supporters in the UK and US. This article then provides a brief overview of anti-Muslim Indian diaspora activism amongst Hindu, Sikh, and Christian communities in the UK and US in order to contextualize how these diasporic Indians, united by the othering of Islam/Muslims as an approach to integration, translates into support for populist radical right agendas. It posits that anti-Muslim anxiety and anti-establishment sentiment motivate Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump.

This article subsequently presents a year-long qualitative research design of Indian diaspora Twitter users who express support for Brexit and Trump. By exploring users who tweet simultaneously about Brexit and Trump, this allows for a convergent rather than a comparative analysis at a transnational scale. As active users in political conversations within the Brexit and Trump Twitter sphere(s), they help shape ideas, strategies, and agendas within the online milieu of populist radical right discourse. For these users, Twitter serves as a digital third place, a networked media environment that best reflects what McArthur and White (2016, p. 1) describe as “sites
of online sociality that both mirror and deviate from physical gathering sites”, but can effectively create the notion of a collective place for community gathering.

This article demonstrates the ways in which these Indian diaspora Twitter users express support for Brexit and Trump by cultivating a discursive online performance of a networked self. By highlighting their Hindu, Sikh, and Christian Indian diasporic identities, these users situate themselves as socially well-integrated in which they emphasise a non-Muslim identity that reproduces the notion that Muslims are a problematic ‘other’. The political and media establishment is similarly targeted for promoting pro-Muslim policies at the expense of non-Muslim communities in order to advance ‘political correctness’. Thus, these users not only further populist radical right narratives but help it adapt towards new boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. This article sheds light on how such practices amongst Indian diaspora individuals adds complexity in their support for populist radical right agendas in the UK and US.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Eviane Cheng Leidig is a PhD Research Fellow at the Center for Research on Extremism and affiliated at the Center for the Study of Political Communication at the University of Oslo. Her current research explores the role of diaspora and migrant networks in creating transnational radical right linkages between India, the UK, and US. Leidig has held visiting researcher positions at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford and the department of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University.