

# Mather Thesis: International Relations: International Studies

**Student: Jan Niklas Huhn**

Program: Master of Arts in International Relations with Global Order in Historical Perspective,  
Leiden University, Faculty of Humanities

**Supervisor: Dr. Eelco Maat**

## **Radical Right Populism and Fascism as a Tactic: Two Sides of the Same Coin? The Case of the Modi led BJP in India.**



**Universiteit  
Leiden**

**Abstract:**

Radical Right Populism is not limited to any specific geography but rather is something that has been on the rise all over the world. This paper is concerned with the question how radical right populism relates to a modern day understanding of fascism. This thesis will first answer the question of what populism is and then compare this to a theoretical approach to fascism. Because I will follow the understanding of populism as a political style a special attention will be given propaganda and how it is delivered to a given constituency. The case study used in this these is the Modi led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. Within the context of this case I will focus on Mann Ki Baat, a monthly radio show held by the Indian Prime Minister. Throughout the text of this thesis I hope to show that radical right populism and fascism have too many similarities, in respect to its definition, theoretical approach towards these concepts and performance, to ignore. Furthermore, I will argue that the perceived direct communication that Mann Ki Baat and social media facilitate are closer to propaganda than a genuine political exchange. The research presented here is building on and adding to the growing literature on populism, social media in the political sphere and radical right politics.

Keywords: Radical right populism, fascism, propaganda, Mann Ki Baat,

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Literature Review and theoretical conceptions of populism .....	7
Radical Right Populism and Fascism .....	13
Keeping in touch with the people: How Indian PM Modi distributes his propaganda .....	22
Mann Ki Baat - Twitter via Radio .....	22
A silence that speaks a thousand words – What is missing from Modi’s communication .....	28
Conclusion .....	30
Bibliography.....	32

## Introduction

Narendra Modi, Viktor Orban, Rodrigo Duterte, Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, what do all these people have in common? They were able to rise to the highest elected offices in their respected country on a radical right populist platform<sup>1</sup>. As of the writing of this thesis, this means that over two billion people living in democracies all over the world are now ruled by radical right populists. In his Sunday essay in *The Guardian* Yascha Mounk is arguing that populism if not addressed might lead to the end of liberal democracy (2018). But one thing that is missing when discussing populism in the news is a clear definition of what populism is. The term when uttered in the news is used to describe a specific leader or movement but what they are actually stand for is often missing. Furthermore, when discussing populism in general and not only radical right populism one is confronted with politicians and movements from both sides of the political spectrum, probably the best example for that would be the 2016 US election with both Bernie Sanders, a self-proclaimed socialist democrat and Donald Trump, with his nationalist nativist approach to politics. Therefore, populism as a whole is often seen as highly elusive, with this described as its most defining characteristic (Moffitt, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). This can not only be observed when relating it to the traditional left and right dichotomy in politics but also to other aspects: Thaksin Shinawatra was the champion of the rural population thanks to his pro-agriculture policies while in India Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) focuses on his development plan based on modernization. According to Mudde and Kaltwasser the difference between leftist populism and right-wing populism is that while left wing populism is inclusionary radical right populism strives for an exclusion of parts of the population from what is considered “the people” (2013). This tendency of radical right populism to exclude some parts of the society they are elected to represent begs for special attention due to the dangers that can come from this exclusion.

One term that is often uttered when speaking of radical right populist leaders is fascism (Hungarian Spectrum, 2018; Snyder, 2018). The leader of the most populous democracy in the world, Narendra Modi also did not escape that label, as for example when famous Indian novelist Arundhati Roy used this term to describe the current BJP government in India in an interview with *Deutsche Welle* (Krishnan, 2018). This begs the question is there anything behind these accusations of fascism

---

<sup>1</sup> For classification for the different leaders as populists see: Modi (Chakravartty & Roy, 2015); Orban (Mudde, 2016); Duterte (Curato, 2017); Trump (Gusterson, 2017); Bolsonaro (Hunter & Power, 2019)

against radical right populist leaders. By adopting a new approach to fascism in modern day offered by American philosopher Jason Stanley this thesis aims at answering the following question: How is radical right populism as performed by the Modi government in India related to fascism as a tactic? To answer this question the thesis will first answer the question of what populism is and what the characteristics of radical right populism are. This leads to the question of how parties that are considered radical right populist relate to Stanley's understanding of fascism as a tactic. As the communication between political leaders and their electorate has changed, the third part of the thesis will then analyze how the communication between Indian PM Modi and the Indian population constitute fascist propaganda? To answer these questions, I will focus on the case of the Modi led BJP. To gain an understanding of what populism is I will review established literature on the topic and compare the different approaches offered by various researchers. In the next part while focusing on Modi and the BJP I will use also other radical right populist movements to supplement my analysis and hope to show that the BJP does not constitute an isolated case. In order to make generalized statements I will put a stronger focus on the AfD in Germany following the approach of the most different cases as presented by Anckar (2008). The third part will be relying heavily on texts by Modi himself, especially in his monthly radio show Mann Ki Baat and analyze these through a qualitative content analysis. Throughout the thesis, I will argue that radical right populism has striking similarities to fascism as it is understood by Stanley. Furthermore, modern social media and Mann Ki Baat enabled Modi to create a propaganda machine that otherwise would have needed tight control over at least one major news outlet.

The insides of this thesis should help us to form an understanding of the political landscape that we are living in and if the rise of radical right populism is actually a new phenomenon and not just something that has always been a part of politics and has just been rebranded in recent times to gain new mass appeal. Furthermore, as social media only gains in popularity focusing on this part of the political performance helps to gain an understanding of one of the most important aspects (if not the most important) of the communication between politicians and their electorate operate. The connection between radical right populism and fascism is not limited to accusations of their political opponents but also to the term itself. This becomes more obvious when regarding a statement of Gilbert Allardyce in an article first published in 1979 where he states in the introduction "we have agreed to use the word without agreeing on how to define it" (2017). This statement can

be applied to populism as well as fascism. This is also an important aspect of modern populism as discussed in Benjamin Moffitt's book *The global rise of populism: Performance, political style, and representation* published in 2016. Therefore, a closer inspection of the connection between these two concepts requires more attention to understand if the connections are just coincidental or if these concepts do share a theoretical background.

Fascism has been researched since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, most of the literature on fascism is heavily reliant on the polity of it (Allardyce, 2017; Eco, 1995; Griffin, 1993; Paxton, 2017). This makes fascism it hard to compare fascism and populism with its more performative understanding. Jason Stanley's 2018 book *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* on the other hand offers a framework to analyze fascism as a tactic to archive power (J. Stanley, 2018, p. 9). This makes this approach to fascism very close to Moffitt's definition of populism as a political style. Hence, by choosing these two frameworks, this thesis will be able to give clear insights into the conceptual similarities and differences between populism and fascism. While on the one hand, it help to gain some clarity on the often-uttered comparison of fascism and populism. On the other, this thesis adds to the academic literature on populism. By comparing it to fascism this thesis opens up the understanding of populism as a new phenomenon. If, as I will argue through the thesis that, fascism as a tactic and populism as a strategy are very similar concepts, this would make it possible to understand both concepts in their historical context, not as two entirely different concepts but rather as something that has changed and adapted to the modern era. Future research could build upon this understanding of the concepts to create a truly comprehensive historiography of both populism and fascism. Furthermore, as this thesis is

While these two definitions are leading in the understanding of these two isms in this text, the work of other scholars has been used to supplement and critique the theoretical approaches offered by Moffitt and Stanley. While this thesis will be more elaborate on the topic of the theoretical understanding of populism due to limitations in scope, fascism, as an already more researched topic, will not get the same attention. Furthermore, while it would be useful to also give attention to the receiving side of radical right populism this does not have direct influence on the research on radical right populism and its relation to fascism in this study. In addition, my language skills only allow me to analyze English texts for the case of the BJP and secondary literature written in English or German on the topic. In addition, further research needs to be based on more case studies to see how the

theoretical approaches used in this study are holding up in different cases from around the world and different times

## Literature Review and theoretical conceptions of populism

When conducting research about populism in the academic literature, most articles or books start with a definition of populism. At this very basic level one encounters the first problem with the term, arguably the most defining feature of populism is the ambiguity of the concept (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, p. 2; Mény & Surel, 2002, p. 2; Moffitt, 2016, p. 11; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 149; Patten, 1996, p. 97; Rooduijn, 2014, p. 574). While most of these authors agree that, there is no coherent definition when it comes to the concept; Dwayne Woods argues that there has been a definition of populism, which became widely accepted within the academic literature. The real problem for scholars has not been to find a common definition but rather to build theory based upon this definition (2014, p. 4). In his chapter, Woods follows with his believe that populism is a discursive strategy (Ibid, p. 16). Understanding populism in this way would open up the analysts to move away from focusing on the political actor and would allow to go beyond a populist/non-populist dichotomy. Through this approach, populism is not something that is only limited to the political sphere but also engages with the society and the forces within the society that make the rise of a populist movement to the center of a political landscape possible. Jagers and Walgrave (2007) have explored this understanding in their study of populism within Belgium. However, for the aim of this thesis understanding populism as discourse is not helpful. By focusing on the supply side this thesis does not aim to answer the questions of why a specific populist movement in terms of societal factors but the specific tools that are deployed by various leaders around the world. The discursive approach is very well equipped to answer larger questions that relate to how a movement came into existence, its development or it effects on the country it exists in as a whole.

Closely related to the discursive approach to populism is populism as an ideology. In this context, ideology should not be understood in the same way as political ideology, the typical left to right distinction when discussing political ideology. That populism cannot be understood in this way becomes utterly appeared, when one considers the 2016 US presidential election. Both Bernie Sanders and now President Trump were given the label populist by the same author in the same

outlet (Cassidy, 2016, 2017). Both politicians occupy the far ends of the political ideological spectrum in the United States. Further, populism as ideology does not mean that all decisions should be made by the people. Within the German context, there is a party which main goal it is to promote national referendums in Germany. While this seems to be an ideological commitment that power in a democracy should resign with the people on most topics, the party does not consider itself populist but rather advocates a more direct form of democracy (Fleck, 2017). In 2008, Ben Stanley published a paper that aimed to create a coherent bases for the understanding of populism as, what he calls a thin ideology. Through review of previously published academic work on the topic he defined the core of this ideology: the existence of two homogeneous units of analysis: 'the people' and the elite'. These two units of analysis stand in an antagonistic relationship. In this version, the people are perceived as nearly benevolent and have to cope with the dangerous elite. Lastly, this is combined with the idea of popular sovereignty. For Stanley the central question that politics addresses is; "who gets what, when and how", and ideological populism would answer this question by stating the people should get what they want, when they want and how they want" (B. Stanley, 2008, p. 102; 107). This sounds very familiar to the claims that the German referendums party tries to make. They just claim that through referendums the people would gain power and political power would shift from the lobby groups and other elites back the people. However, what is missing is an actual ideology that would be supported by the thin ideology of populism. By not offering any other political view apart from populism it elevates populism to a full ideology, and through that loses what populism makes populism.

A major contribution to the ideological understanding of populism was offered in the paper *Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism* by stressing the how populism is not static but dynamic on various levels (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). In their view, 'the pure people', 'the corrupt elite' and the appeal to the general will are the three defining features of populism. Further, a populist actor or a movement does not have to be purely populist in every case and the thin ideology provides the center of the movement at any given point with the possibility to absorb different political views within their own movement. In addition, the degree to which a populist actor adheres to the different populist concepts varies and fluctuates over time (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, pp. 151-152). By accepting that the label populist cannot be applied in a dichotomy, it opens up the possibility of understanding a greater part of politics within democratic regimes as populist at least

in parts. This makes the populist ideology something like a tool that can be used by a movement or leader in case it is needed. This possibility of using populism at specific points in time will be explored later when discussing populism as a political style.

The main argument of the paper by Mudde and Kaltwasser is that populism can be separated into two different forms: inclusive populism, that is often connected to the populism that is associated with left wing movements in Latin America and exclusionary populism associated with European right-wing movements. Here it is important to mention that the authors also stress that a single movement is rarely either fully exclusionary or inclusionary. Following this logic, one has to understand this as a spectrum and a single movement or party over time can move along this spectrum. Furthermore, a party can be more or less populist in different political spheres at the same time (for example the same party can present itself in different ways in national and regional politics). Mudde and Kaltwasser show how these different forms of populism are manifested in a material, political and symbolic dimension. While the symbolic dimension is, according to the authors, the least tangible dimension, this is the most important for the question this thesis attempts to answer. It is the symbolic dimension that actually defines the boundaries of the concepts used by populist movements, i.e. people and elite. While the people are often portrayed as a fully homogeneous group, this is very seldom (only to avoid to say never) the case. Countries are made up of people from different economic background, ethnic background, religious background, people of the same nation have various local traditions and dialects and, in many cases, even different languages. In this dimension, the populist movement defines who is part of the people and who is not as well as which groups are included in the corrupt elite. By referring to the populist movements in Europe Mudde and Kaltwasser show that these movements share the following perceptions. On the one hand, the common people are disenfranchised because of an elite conspiracy and only the populist player can represent the people's voice (often illustrated through the claim to speak for the silent majority). In addition to the exclusion of the elite these European populist also exclude what is described as non-native groups (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, pp. 165-167).

In the case of the before mentioned study the authors miss to give the thick ideology that defines the exclusionary populism of Europe the needed attention. A general shortcoming within the

approach is that it missed the importance of the construct behind populism, nationalism. As the idea of the native is a construct of its own, I think it is not feasible to make this distinction in the analysis of populism. As all people who are living within a nation, no matter of their political status or their eligibility to cast a vote are impacted by populist rhetoric and actions. Following this logic, exclusionary populism differs from inclusionary populism by adding a further concept, what I will call “the other”. The idea of this twofold dynamic has been mentioned by Abts and Rummens (2007) in their publication *Democracy versus Populism*. The authors use the political theory of Nazi jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt (1888 – 1965) to thicken the thin ideology of populism. The old elites are still considered as part of the native and part of the nation as a whole while the other is not. The other is not only defied as not being part of the people and nation but also by the power structure that follows. Because the other is not part of the people they often also lack political representation and/or economic power. In most countries people have to undergo a long and strenuous process to gain the right to vote and have their voices heard and by denying some parts of the population the most basic dignities right-wing nationalist populism can threaten the livelihood and in some cases even the lives of the most valuable parts of society. At the same time while these groups are often the ones with the least political and economic power, they are often portrayed as a genuine threat to the society due to either cultural differences or in extreme cases the classification of a whole group of people as violent (This often happens through either the claim that the other is linked to a terrorist group or prone to sexual violence and rape).

This idea that right-wing or exclusionary populism introduces another part of society can be merged with Ernesto Laclau’s approach towards populism: populism as political logic. The central argument of this approach is that “the people”, do not exist as such, and it is the populist who constructs them (Laclau, 2005, p. 72). Further, political logic follows the authors previous established concept of social logic, in his words: “I see social logic as involving a rarefied system of statements – that is to say, a system of drawing a horizon within some objects are representable while others are excluded” (Laclau, 2005, p. 117). What differentiates a social from a political logic is that the political logic strives towards institutionalization of these statements. The third fundamental part of Laclau’s political logic approach is that populism is a contradiction within itself. The people can only exist when they are created by the exploitation of the elite and vice versa. As this approach understands all its units of analysis as a construct it is not limited to the addition of further constructs as long as

these are not shaking the other fundamental parts of the theory. In the case of the non-native other, this new other is threatening the people, who are not protected by the elites, the reasons for that vary from movement to movement. Without the other, the people would not need protection that the elites should offer the people but are not. The people are only constructed by their difference to the elite and the other. If one of these constructs would not be part of the society or nation the whole populist agenda would collapse. The need for protection that the populist offers only exists when the other is constructed as a threat to the people.

However, this approach was met by criticism from other scholars. By focusing on the hope for institutionalization and the demands of the people and their claims. Through this understanding the idea of populism becomes so watered down that nearly all movements can be understood as populist movements. Laclau misses the most important part of democracy, that demands are made by the people and that these demands are often met by a movement or party (Žižek, 2006). In addition, some modern political movements like the Occupy movement that consciously distance themselves from the populist logic and through question the universalist character of populism that Laclau describes (Moffitt, 2016, pp. 24-25). Nevertheless, the occupy movement can be understood as populist in the way that it was a limited populist movement. It created a homogeneous class as the 1% (elite) and the 99% (the people), however the people and elites were only homogeneous in the realm of their economic interest. As long as these movements are understood in their specific circumstances, they can be studied as populist movements and the call of a movement that it is not populist should not be barrier for academic work on these movements.

In his book, *The Global Rise of Populism* (2016) Benjamin Moffitt tries to establish populism as a political style rather than an ideology or a form of discourse. This approach, while acknowledging the constructivism within populism, focuses heavily on the *performance* of politics. According to Moffitt there are three characteristic features of the populist performance, like all approaches the appeal to the people vs the elites, bad manners and lastly focus on crisis, breakdown or threat (2016, p. 29). The roadmap provided by this approach has the advantage, that on the one hand it gives a clear indication what to look for when discussing populist movements and on the other it also accepts the idea, as it has been argued by Laclau that populism exists on a spectrum rather than an absolute. As this theory was created to research all forms of populism, it does not make special notice of exclusionary populism and its particularities. By changing one of the central points of

populism from “the people” vs “the elite” to “the people” vs “the elites” and “the other”, the approach offers a direct look into what makes a populist a right-wing nationalist populist. Further, through the understanding of performance it puts heavy emphasis on the media and its role within populism and the possible rise of a populist movement. The way how politics is performed has changed in recent years dramatically through the introduction of social media. The leaders can now directly speak to the people and give the impression that they are directly listened to the voice of the people through tweeting or similar forms of communication. By doing so the movement is able to construct their society and nation on their own terms. This can lead to dramatic rifts between what the society is/was/should be in the rhetoric of right-wing nationalist populists and the consensus constructs of the history and the current state of the nation.

Populism of left wing parties can also follow the same path as right wing nationalist movements, however there are often important societal specialties to consider in any case. Therefore, there cannot be one universal understanding of what populism is. The debate between discourse, thin ideology or style are all valid in their own way. Because this thesis is mostly concerned with the supply side of domestic politics, understanding populism as political style will provide the best theoretical approach to the topic. Nevertheless, for larger studies that are not only concerned with the populist movements and their own texts the approach of populism as a discourse can help to include forces that are not taken into account in populism as a political style. This approach is then most favorable for studies that are trying to answer the question what are all the societal factors that facilitate a populist movement to gain power. The approach of populism as a political logic also is more suitable for studies of the wider environment of a populist movement and is especially suitable for scholars that follow a post structural approach as it explicitly mentions the importance to understand our social and political environment as constructs.

All these approaches understand populism as empty on the inside and only referring to the split in society between “the people” and an “elite”, a thin ideology needs something thick to make it presentable, an idea cannot exist in a vacuum and style needs substance. Therefore, it is always important to understand what kind of ideology is the corresponding thick ideology or substance. At the same time, it is important to understand that an ideology/discourse/political principle like nationalism will present itself in localized versions (as I will show in the next chapter). Nationalism presents itself as a concept that corresponds well to the claims of populism. Populism as it understood

here as a political style within liberal democracies cannot exist without the structure of the nation. Furthermore, another defining feature of nationalism is that it follows the same distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary as populism. For example the left wing populist groups in Latin America construct a nation that includes indigenous societies and other underrepresented classes while radical right European populism is often based on the exclusion of minorities from the body of the nation. In a study on the relationship between nationalism and populism De Cleen (2017) argues that populism is either exclusionary or inclusionary because of the underlying nationalism that forms it. Therefore, the nationalism that forms a right-wing populist movement has direct influence on the other important populist concepts, the people, the elite and the other.

## Radical Right Populism and Fascism

In this thesis, I will follow a modernist approach towards nations and nationalism that is most famously represented by Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner. While Anderson (2006) approaches nationalism as a cultural phenomenon and understands the nation as an imagined (constructed) community, Gellner (2008) understands nationalism as a political phenomenon and the nation as “the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture” (p. 56). Both scholars agree that the nation is a construct and that also implies change over time. The way both scholars have conducted their research has clear implications for their understanding of the workings of nationalism. Andersons approach follows the history of nationalism mostly within the context of the creoles in South America and their slow movement towards their imagined community that was created by the white populations of South America in opposition to the center of Empire (and the land of their forefathers) (Anderson, 2006, pp. 50-53). This can be seen as a way of bottom up nationalism as the basis for this was the population and their collective will to depart from their colonial center. Gellner on the other hand looks at different starting points, not only countries that have been colonized but also the slow transition towards nationalism in Europe with a strong emphasis on class. Nationalism in this approach follows the imposition of elite culture on the people that are considered being part of the nation (Gellner, 2008, p. 49). Further, Gellner argues that the imposition of homogeneity is linked to the needs of modern industrialist nations, especially through standardized education (pp. 44 - 45). This form of top down nationalism, can be well integrated into the study of populism as a political style. The nation is recreated by the populist movement that uses the appeal of nationalist

symbols and national identity in general to legitimate their claim towards the existence of the homogeneous people that inhabits a particular geographical space.

At this point it is important to mention that besides some countries claiming to be built upon a homogeneous society, for example, Japan, the reality often shows a different picture, differences in gender, class, ethnicity, religious views and sexual orientation can exist within group of people who might seem homogeneous at first glance<sup>2</sup>. As mentioned above populism is constructing the homogeneous people where the previously mentioned differences do not exist or do not matter, it seems that nationalism strives towards this. While the people already exist in the language of populists it appears to be nationalism that provides a more stable foundation to actually move towards a homogenous nation. This is especially true for radical right populism, as it opens up the possibility to draw a clear line who is included in the people and the nation and who is not. This tendency of nationalism has been criticized from the left and the right, for example authors who glorify Imperialism like Elie Kedourie who characterizes nationalism as an ideology as irrational, narrow, hateful and destructive and in opposition to autonomy and liberty for all people (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 7). On the other hand, nationalism with its appeal towards rationalism and the ideas of enlightenment is just a charade as argued by Chatterjee in 1986. According to the author, nationalist thought has imprisoned the liberal-rationalist thought and is using these values to reproduce power structures (pp. 17-18). There seems to be the greatest problem with populism and nationalism and their relationship with liberal democracy. Liberal democracy in its modern form is defined by its strive to “contribute to the development of the capacities of the individual and offer a more positive form of liberty through focusing on more on the provision of social and economic rights, which give meaning and value to civil and political rights” (Hobson, 2012). This focus on the individual is in stark contrast to the claim of the political claim that “the people” have all the same needs. The German Nazi scholar Carl Schmitt proposed an understanding of democracy that is much closer to the one that populists promote, the idea that democracy is the substantial identity of all citizens of a nation and that through democracy they are able to express their single popular will<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore the legitimacy of the leader is based upon the idea that the leader is part of the people and gives voice

---

<sup>2</sup> In addition, gender alone already divides the population as different genders have different needs and wants.

<sup>3</sup> This idea is linked to the concept of *volonte generale* as it has been formulated by Rousseau.

to this group (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 415). Here we can see clear parallels between the form of democracy that is promoted by Schmitt and the way radical right populism is working. The strong emphasis on unity based on homogeneity in opposition to the often-uttered buzzwords unity through diversity that liberal democracy is the best representation at the moment. Furthermore, Schmitt's clear distinction between Friend and Enemy as two absolutes reflect the relation between of elite vs the people vs the other as used in a stable in radical right populist rhetoric (Herberg-Rothe, 2004).

Our understanding of radical right populism and the effects of it have some striking similarities to fascism and its predecessor political anti-Semitism. Fascism is most commonly connected to Germany and Italy of the time after WWI until the end of the Second World War. When analyzing the historical development in Germany that led to Hitler's rise to power Hannah Arendt discusses anti-Semitism as a political phenomenon in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973). The first striking similarity is that political anti-Semitism was a force that was prevalent on the left and on the right, similar to modern populism which leads to the rational that just like populism political anti-Semitism can be understood as a thin ideology, discourse or political style and not a fully-fledged ideology. However, the similarities do not end here: One very important aspect that came out of political anti-Semitism was what Arendt calls *the Mob* (Ibid, p. 107). Following Arendt, who in her analysis accepts the existence of *the people*, the mob "is primarily a group in which the residue of all classes are represented. [...] [T]he mob hates society from which it is excluded, as well as parliament where it is not represented". This definition is extremely close to the consensus of modern populism which holds the perception that the people (a construct prevalent in both isms) are not represented by modern society as well as by the elites who control the parliament. With the help racism the people or mob were then transformed to a homogeneous group as well as constructing Jews as a powerful other (Ibid, pp. 165-166). Here we have the second similarity: some of the base assumptions are the same just that what used to be constructed as the Jews in modern populism became the elite. Last but not least, political anti-Semitism showed a hostile attitude towards the intelligentsia while at the same time was friendly towards the Jewish business class (Ibid, p. 44). This friendliness towards business elites but antagonism towards academics shows in many different extreme right populist movements. For example, the AfD was first based on a libertarian platform as well as Modi's pro-development attitude. While at the same time both

movements are criticizing the established academics in their environment<sup>4</sup>. This anti-intellectualism has also been describing as a fundamental feature of fascism by Stanley as mentioned in the introduction.

Fascism puts great emphasis on the idea of struggle rather than cooperation. According to Eco, from a fascist perspective “there is no struggle for life but, rather, life is lived for struggle” (1995, p. 7). This idea of struggle can be directly translated into the idea of Darwinism, as Darwinism and Social Darwinism in particular, might be the purest form of struggle to come out on top. American philosopher Jason Stanley relates this to libertarianism as he states: “Economic libertarianism is, after all, the Manhattan dinner party face of social Darwinism” (J. Stanley, 2018, p. 178). Here it is important to draw a line between leftist populism and the extreme right populism that is practiced by the BJP under Modi and the AfD. The idea to open up the economic realm towards a more libertarian model (more struggle) is always present in extreme right populism. That can be seen not only in the two cases that I chose for my case studies but also in other populists all over the world. For example, in South America Jair Bolsonaro who proposes economic deregulation (The Economist, 2018) or Trumps ongoing crusade against all forms of economic regulation (Investor's Business Daily, 2018).

But apart from these base assumptions what does fascism actually stand for? This question might be at the center of what fascism actually is, aloof and highly adaptable. Robert Paxton in his 1998 article on the theory of fascism spends roughly a third of the article describing the problems that one faces when actually trying to come up with an all-encompassing definition that fits all fascist regimes. This problem of clearly defining fascism has already been discussed by different scholars before. For example In the beginning of his book Stanley Payne states that fascism is probably the vaguest of the contemporary political terms while concluding in the last chapter that there cannot be an clear “either-or” approach and should not look for the absolute core when dealing with fascism (Payne, 1983, pp. 4, 195). In addition Roger Giffin, states that probably the only uncontroversial statement that can be made regarding fascism is about the heritage of its name

---

<sup>4</sup> In the case of India, probably two of the most striking examples are the reorientation of the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (Outlook Web Bureau, 2018) as well as the changes that happened within the Indian Council for Historical Research (Indian Cultural Forum, 2016). The AfD goes so far and taking the favorite topic of populists fake news and transfer that to science (especially social science and humanities) in sofar as calling parts of it fake science (Agarwala, 2016).

(Griffin, 1993). This idea that fascism defies an easy and clear definition is echoed by the treatment of populism by scholars. While most ideologies have a clear text that they are based upon fascism is missing this. While there are fascist scholars and texts written by them they are hardly mentioned within the fascist movements<sup>5</sup>. But in opposition to socialist or Marxist leaders who try adhere to (and in some cases bend the meaning of) basic scriptures (Paxton, 2017).

This literary void is mirrored by populism. Radical right populist leaders are more inclined to reference the greatness of their nation rather than any universalist ideology. Something that can also be seen in fascism too as Stanley puts it the reference to a mythical past. This mystic past has been “tragically” destroyed and depending on specific circumstances this past is either defined as religiously, racially or culturally pure (J. Stanley, 2018, pp. xvi, 3). This claim towards a mythical past is a factor both in the BJP and the AfD. The AfD wants to change the whole approach to German history. Party leader Alexander Gauland called the Nazi time just a *Vogelschiss* (Bird shit<sup>6</sup>) within the German history. While at the promoting an approach that speaks of more than 1500 years of German history. This view is rather problematic especially when claiming parts of central European history as German history at a time when there was nothing at even remotely resembled the modern German state. This approach is much closer to the way how history was understood during the Third Reich. This understanding of history, according to Frank-Lothar Kroll serviced the expansionist policies under Hitler (1996). The Modi government on does a similar thing. In 2018 the Indian government created a committee which aim it is to rewrite parts of India’s ancient history that would present Indian Hindus as the sole descendants of the first inhabitants of the geography now called India (Jain & Lasseter, 2018). These two examples show how the extreme right populists are working to redefine the history away from a differentiated view towards one that fits a nationalist view of their past. This is a clear break in the context of India and Germany, two nations that have, in their own respect, favored some form of multiculturalism within their nation<sup>7</sup>. This also

---

<sup>5</sup> This might be related to the anti-intellectualism of these groups.

<sup>6</sup> A German idiom that implies something is not important or neglectable.

<sup>7</sup> In India this is present through the mantra Unity in Diversity, first championed by India’s First PM Nehru. The German government prides itself on the statement, that Germany is a Migration country, something that was put into action most prevalently when chancellor Merkel decided to take in over a million refugees in 2015.

mean for the right-wing populist that the people are constructed along these lines. Hence being German is defined by heritage and being Indian is defined by being Hindu.

That this German of pure German heritage and the “true Indian” must be defended can be seen in the sexual anxiety that both the AfD and the BJP are promoting, a staple of fascism according to Stanley(2018, p. 217). In the Indian context, this is manifested through the fear of a “Love-Jihad”. According to Tanika Sarkar the notion of the Hindu right that Muslims are portrayed as an invading force that use rape as a weapon has been a staple of the Hindu right since the 1920s. However, now there are some cases that, highly promoted through social media, to reinforce this notion. Something that is directly related to the idea that Hindus and Muslims are completely incompatible (Sarkar, 2018). The AfD claims that women in Germany are living in fear and are scared to go to some places in the country. This is attributed to the influx of Muslim migrants in Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017). In this case both parties are promoting a sexualized threat that comes from the other, the part that is not part of the people that they claim to represent. This perceived threat has then further consequences for the larger society. According to Paxton. the believe in fascism, that one’s group is a victim, in this case the pure Indian or German women in particular, justifies “any action against the group’s enemies” (Paxton, 2017, p. 86). In India, this manifests through the killing of Muslim men who date Indian women<sup>8</sup>. In the German context this is relates to the a rising number of attacks on refugees and refugee hostels (Zeit Online, 2018). While in both countries these forms of violence are nothing new. The discourse around the sexual threat that the respective Other is posing to the women who are seen as part of the people legitimizes these attacks. The “love Jihad” as well as the narrative that refugees are raping in Germany both helps to construct the people that Modi and the AfD claim to represent as victims. This form of victimhood is just another facet in Stanley’s understanding of fascism.

But this tendency to portray the dominant group within a country as victims is not limited to these two cases. In an article published in 2017 Mols and Jetten described that this from of victimhood is a favored narrative, by populists on the left and on the right, especially during times of economic prosperity. This way a perceived crisis can be created and sustained. The crisis then justifies an

---

<sup>8</sup> Some of these incidents are directly mentioned in Tanika Sarkar’s article, but there are many more, for examples see Borpujari (2018).

abrupt shift from the previous politics. Benjamin Moffitt even goes so far and claims that the focus on crisis is a fundamental feature of populism (on the left and the right).

This trend to portray that the country, that populists are working in, is in a state of crisis is directly related to what Stanley calls unreality. By unreality Stanley means that a fascist leader is able to replace truth with power and thereby one cannot assess the arguments by the fascists by a common standard (J. Stanley, 2018, p. 57). Especially in the context of India this state of unreality is not directly created by Modi but rather through an informal network of WhatsApp groups and other forms or social media, that promote these ideas (Udupa, 2018). But the unwillingness to talk about this issue (creating an unreality) and profiting from these aspects do link Modi to this phenomenon. In this case it not important what is said but rather what is not said. In Germany this is can also be observed as well, but with the difference that the AfD is also directly taking part in this, as shown in the previous example where the AfD claims that German women live in fear. Moffitt relates that within the populist context directly to the claim that populist movements are promoting and building on conspiracies. This is then connected to the claim that these conspiracy theories gain more support because the there is a greater emphasis on unity than on the truth (Moffitt, 2016, pp. 39, 71). Overall both fascism and extreme right populism are built around a narrative that they create themselves. These narratives then justify the break from political, and in some cases even social, traditions in the respective country.

Before talking about propaganda and how this is related to fascism and extreme right populism as well as how a state of unreality with a crisis at its core is created, I have to mention the differences of extreme right populism and how we understand fascism. Roger Eatwell concludes in his chapter on the similarities of populism and fascism in the *Oxford Handbook on Populism* that the two are fundamentally different because populism is a form of democracy while fascism on the other hand tries to get rid of it altogether (Eatwell, 2017, p. 450). While I fundamentally agree with his assessment, it seems that Eatwell is too focused on the final result of fascism and approaches on the two as ideologies as stated in the introduction (Ibid, p. 432). Furthermore, Eatwell, while acknowledging the difference between leftist inclusionary populism and right-wing exclusionary populism, compared populism as a whole to fascism whereas these two cannot be equated in a comparison to fascism. Finally, Eatwell also only understand fascism in it's "original form" of the first

half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and does not give enough weight to how fascism is heavily influenced by its historical context.

Nevertheless, there are some important differences between radical right populism and fascism. According to Paxon, fascism does require an always male leader who rises to the role of “national chieftain” (2017, p. 86). Right wing populism on the other hand, while strongly dominated by men, also has women in the leading positions. In the AfD, Frauke Petry was for many the face of the movement during her term as chairwoman of the party. Other female populists on the right include Pauline Hanson in Australia or Marine Le Pen head of the National Rally (formally known as National Front) in France.

Jason Stanley furthermore puts a strong emphasis on law and order politics. In fascism this is manifested through the division of citizens into two classes: those who are lawful by nature (the ones of the nation) and those who are inherent lawless, the other (J. Stanley, 2018, p. 110). While the elite in populism is presented as not part of the people, and not representing the nation, they are rarely represented as lawless. This is only in some cases attributed to the Other. What is important to mention is that the elite in most cases does not differ from the people in terms of ethnicity, race, religion or other forms of identity that are perceived as fixed. For example, in the German context *Muslim* refugees who are inherently prone to rape. In India on the other hand this difference is more pronounced through incapability, as stated before, rather than inherent lawlessness.

As I am not claiming that extreme right populism and fascism are the same but rather have so many intersections that one should consider the history of fascism when discussing extreme right populism, these differences are foreseeable. The differences within the “original” fascist movements of the first half of the twentieth century are already so pronounced that no single regime fulfills all the theoretical base assumptions ascribed to fascism, these differences can be understood as a way how fascism was translated into the new century<sup>9</sup>. At the same time Eatwell’s claim that fascism wants to get rid of democracy has to be considered as a difference. This, again, might be an update of fascism and extreme right-wing populism might work as a stepping stone into full fascism but this approach needs further research based upon case studies with extreme right

---

<sup>9</sup> Gilbert Alladyce goes so far in his 1979 article to say that scholars have to abandon the term fascism altogether and only focus on the individual regimes.

populist leaders who have been in power long enough to transform their political landscape in such a way.

All the above requires a communication between the leader of the movement, may it be fascist, extreme right populist or even a fully liberal democracy. However in the case of a fascism this communication is characterized by propaganda . Stanley defines propaganda as the communication that hides clearly problematic goals by masking them with ideals that are widely accepted (by their followers or sympathizers) (Stanley, 2018, p. 24). In his book *How Propaganda Works* (2015) Stanley also argues against the notion that propaganda has to be false or insincere (p. 39). The problem with this definition is that what consists as “clearly problematic” is highly subjective. In the case of this thesis this is understood as a clear break from liberal democracy, a move towards authoritarianism and dehumanizing some groups. That this is the case both in the Modi led BJP and AfD in Germany has already been demonstrated in the previous paragraphs on sexual anxiety, crisis and unreality. In the next section I will take a closer look on this propaganda is performed by the Modi led BJP. This final focus on propaganda and not only what it said but also on the channels that are chosen to distribute this to the electorate is one of the most prevalent changes that have happened in the political landscape. The change in media consumption enables political fringe movements to create a propaganda machine that otherwise would have needed years of planning and large investments. That having a media outlet that promotes the personal goals of populists is a factor that facilitates populists to gain power can be exemplified on two cases from vastly different political backgrounds: Former Thai PM Thaksin and former Italian PM Berlusconi. Both were heading large media companies before rising to power, while this can not be equated to the sole reason to their success it also cannot be dismissed as both were able to rise to power in the pre-social media age. This means they were able to entirely control the narrative surrounding them and spread propaganda to the people who saw their media companies as their most important source of information. Nowadays social media has democratized this form of power as both the Modi led BJP and the AfD in Germany can rely on the bubble that they created within the larger realm of social media as their own cheap (in terms of money and people needed) media empire/propaganda machine.

## Keeping in touch with the people: How Indian PM Modi distributes his propaganda

### Mann Ki Baat - Twitter via Radio

The monthly radio show, Mann Ki Baat, functions as a constant connection between Modi and his voter base. In the show, Modi will read the letters that ordinary Indians have sent him and will answer questions or give advice in response. This kind of show tries to portray the politician, in this case PM Modi, as one of the people and that he cares about the daily struggles of Indians. By showing how he cares about the “small issues” Modi is able to portray himself as ordinary. In some cases he also points to his “ordinariness” directly, as seen in July 2015: “[In regard to yoga becoming more popular in the whole world and yoga day]I do not know how the intellectual class, elites of the world would analyze this event. But I can feel and every Indian can experience that the whole world is very curious to know more about India” (Modi, 2015a).<sup>10</sup> By positioning himself with every Indian and in opposition to the intellectual class or elites of the world he shows that he truly thinks like every Indian. Another example for Modi’s ordinariness the way he interacts with a little boy named Abhi in the March 2016 edition of Mann Ki Baat. The young boy reminds him of a statement during an earlier Mann Ki Baat in which Modi advised people to fill a bowl with water for birds during the summer. Modi then thanks the boy for reminding him and repeats this simple advice (Modi, 2016b). Here the Indian Prime Minister portrays himself just as an older man who can take advice from younger children. This form of humanizing a major political figure is not unique to Modi; another famous example is Vladimir Putin’s yearly TV call-in show. In the show the President of the Russian Federation and former director of the Russian intelligence service interacts with callers on all kinds of issues: from how to convince your spouse to get a dog to advising a four-year-old to sleep a lot if he wants to become president (TheMoscowTimes, 2015). Both shows appear to be genuine and spontaneous. By doing so, the politician performs some of the most fundamental acts that define populist leaders according to Moffitt, performing ordinariness (2016, p. 55). However, Stuti Saxena

---

<sup>10</sup> An example on the offensive side would be the controversy surrounding expensive items of clothing. BJP as well as Congress politicians accused each other of wearing expensive suits or scarves (TNN, 2018). By doing so the politicians try to show that the others are one the one hand not what they claim to be (in this case ordinary) and on the other following a populist style of politics, by portraying the other politicians as out of touch elites.

concludes in her paper on Mann Ki Baat that the show is a valuable interface for the people to share their suggestions and concerns on myriad issues (2016) and through that the show actually facilitates real conversation between Modi and his constituencies. Notwithstanding, this is undermined by the statistics mentioned in the beginning of the paper. Each episode features three to four letters while over two hundred thousand messages have been submitted by listeners by the time the article was written. This, in addition to Modi's own statement during a Mann Ki Baat that "the people should get the right news and good news" (Modi, 2016a), indicated that there is selective process operating that selects submissions for broadcast based on how much they fit into the narrative that PM Modi wants to propagate.

Politicians like all other people will try not getting embarrassed in front of a large crowd. What differs is the control they have about what might get publicized about them or what they will get confronted during an interview. It has to be mentioned at this point, even in the most liberal democracies, politicians seldom agree to interviews without any prior notice about the questions that follow or already have trust in the media outlet they are engaging with<sup>11</sup>. However, here lays one on the biggest contradictions of a populist leader according to Moffitt, while presenting themselves as ordinary they also have to present themselves as extraordinary in order to legitimate their claim to power (2016, p. 57). In the case of Modi, Mann Ki Baat offers him a platform to achieve this balancing act. There is no information about the editorial process or personnel involved in the production of the episodes in English. Furthermore, one has to consider while the show is broadcasted on various radio stations it is only the team behind the prime minister that exercises power over what will be included in an episode and not a collaboration of representatives. This has to be seen in connection to Modi's practice of not holding a single press conference during his rule of prime minister. Press conferences can be seen as potential danger for the power holder. In his analysis of the effect of presidential press conferences on the American news circle, Eshbaugh-Soha (2013) concluded that the press conferences have a direct effect on the news circle and are reported on the evening news. In a follow-up study Eshbaugh-Soha (2016) showed that during the evening news the presidential press conference is presented in very different ways, from more favorable to

---

<sup>11</sup> For further information see, former presidential campaign spokeswoman Dorie Clark's advice on how to engage with the press (who she calls the enemy in a headline) (2014).

a general negative representation of the president's words<sup>12</sup>. This means that while the politicians and their team is able to control what they are saying the report about what is said is out of their control. But there is even another, inherent danger in press conferences: questions that a politician might not want to answer at a given time. But dodging a question has great influence on the trustworthiness of a politicians as a recent study shows (Clementson, 2018). The dodging of questions is also seen as something that is inherent politics (especially of the established elites) and facilitates the disengagement with politics (Ibid.: 94). This can be seen as a double threat to a populist politician who claims to be outside the elite and function on the premise that they represent the people. The control that the Mann Ki Baat offers Modi over what and how it is presented cannot be reproduced without tight control over the whole press. That control over the press can be a significant aid to any populist leader can also be observed in former Thai president Thaksin Shinawatra who after ascending to the top post in Thai politics started to use the state media to portray a very controlled picture about himself (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2008, p. 65). Another example of the importance of media control is the case of Silvio Berlusconi who owned a media empire before going into politics. His company then created favorable coverage to help his bid for the highest office in Italy (Moffitt, 2016, p. 81). What is important to see here is that while populist leadership in Latin America led to a reform of the media landscape through political reform. This tendency has been documented by Silvio Waisbord (2011), furthermore the author assesses that the media is clearly divided into the Schmittian categories of either friend or foe. Modi is able to completely ignore the traditional media by on the one hand providing a steady flow of information through his Mann Ki Baat as well as through Twitter. This means for the Indian PM that there is no need to transform the Indian media landscape in the way Latin American populist leaders saw fit. The control over the message through these means help Modi to not only perform liberal democracy (in the sense that he is not directly attacking the free press) but at the same time present himself as a leader of extraordinary ordinariness.

Another way in which Modi presents his ordinariness and connection to the people especially the poorer and rural of his constituents is khadi. He mentioned the cloth first in the October 2014 Mann Ki Baat and urges people to buy more of the cloth for Diwali. He connects khadi to the poor but at

---

<sup>12</sup> The author uses the example of Fox's coverage as a negative and the Huffingtonpost as a positive example during the Obama years.

the same time also as something that is fundamentally Indian in this context, he also mentions the connection between the fabric and Gandhi. In the next installment of Mann Ki Baat (November 2014) Modi then congratulates his listeners for having increased the sales of khadi products. In this, Modi's action can be seen as typical right wing populist. On the one hand side is he making the connection to the poorer of the country by promoting something that is of the people that even carries some nationalistic symbolic power<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, he is empowering the people. He is showing that it is not the political elite that can bring change and, in this case, help the poor but it is ordinary Indians themselves who can do these things. It is the people who help the people and not the politicians. He is even more direct with that assessment when claiming in the same broadcast that "[s]ometimes I feel the Nation is way ahead and the government is lacking behind" (Modi, 2014). It is the people who make the change and not the government, as this statement implies. Furthermore, this also means that the government is not representing the people anymore and it needs to be more directly influenced by the nation (people). By saying these things after reaching the highest level in government it becomes of absolute importance to prove that Modi is still part of the people who think towards the future and is not seen as part the government that he just before bashed as out of touch. That Modi tries to portray what he says during the radio show as actually what Indians have to say becomes most obvious in the final sentences during the show that marked the one-year anniversary of Mann Ki Baat October 2015: "My 'Mann Ki Baat' has in the true sense become your 'Mann Ki Baat.' I listen to you, I think for you, I look into your suggestions and that triggers a thought process in me which reaches you through Akashvani. I speak, but the words are yours and this gives me immense satisfaction". In this small exempt Modi presents himself as a vessel for the people. It is not just that he knows what the people are saying but he is giving all of them a voice. This would imply that the voice that comes from the Indian people is a homogeneous voice. This might be hard to believe for a country with a population of more than one billion people and immense cultural diversity. Instead it seems that the kind of people that Modi says are talking are just the people who are not interested in politics but want to help the country. And to tackle the countries problems it is the responsibility of the individual as part of the people to make the changes (as we saw through the khadi promotion/poverty relieve). This gives the impression that the people are holding the

---

<sup>13</sup> At this point I would like to reference footnote 12 and the quarrel around the prices of items of luxury clothing.

power. From a Marxist perspective this could be an attempt to counter the alienation that poorer classes are experiencing everywhere in the world. In this way Mann Ki Baat gives the listener a sense of importance and power. Modi build his own publication with him in the center that not only promotes him as the speaking vessel of the people but also gives a sense of empowerment back to his listeners.

The establishment of such an institution like the Mann Ki Baat can only be facilitated when the politician already consolidated enough support of the people and with necessary media infrastructure. Therefore, we need to ask, what came before the Mann Ki Baat, in Modi's case it was Twitter. One of the first scholarly discussion of Modi's use of Twitter was conducted by Pal (2015), in the paper the author claims that Twitter was of vital importance for Modi in changing the way he was perceived. Modi as the head of the BJP was an opportunity for the party to change its own image by putting forward a new modern face<sup>14</sup>. This is probably best summarized by Pal's own words: "The BJP no longer stood only for older Hindu men in saffron. Instead, here was a man who could take a selfie with one hand and use the other for a trident when needed" (2015, p. 384). When just having a superficial look at the Twitter accounts of the BJP and Modi it becomes apparent that, it is Modi who speaks for the BJP and not vice versa. While the official BJP Twitter account published over 150 thousand tweets it attracted about 9.5 million followers on the other hand, Modi's official twitter account tweeted less than 20 thousand times but attracted over 40 million followers (as of April 2017). Twitter enabled Modi to exercise the same control over the discourse about him during the early phase of his transition from a Gujarati Chief Minister to Prime Minister of India, as he would later have as PM. As Pal mentions Modi was able to transform his image from a religious hardliner to a champion of development. Furthermore, Twitter did not only speak to the followers of Indian political TV or news shows but everyone in the world who might be interested. This had the effect that Modi got an international rather than domestic rebranding. In a more detailed analysis of Modi's tweets by a group of researchers from the University of Michigan concluded that there were four distinct phases in Modi's tweets: Early tweets (around 2011) which centered around Hindutva and Development. Phase two (circa 2012), preparing for national leadership, during this phase tweets moved from Gujarati issues to national issues. Phase three, the 2014 elections and its

---

<sup>14</sup> If the BJP used Modi to garb power or Modi used the BJP is nearly impossible to find out using empirical methods and it does not make a difference for the argument of this study.

battle lines and lastly his time as PM where his tweets moved away from political topics more towards sports and other topics (Pal, Chandra, & Vydiswaran, 2016). With this in mind, Mann Ki Baat can be seen as an extension of this trend. Like with twitter Modi is able to fully control the message that reaches everyone who wants to listen. And by including, the probably carefully selected, letters and calls from “ordinary Indians” the PM is able to recreate the perceived direct communication as it is possible through twitter.

Mann Ki Baat became the personal Twitter of the Indian PM. As mentioned before, the different phases of Modi’s Twitter habits show a trivialization. While the early tweets were often directly connected to either Hindutva or other forms of traditionalism, later tweets related to sports and the youth (Pal et al., 2016, p. 57). This new focus on the youth and sports is also reflected in the topics the Indian PM chooses for his Mann Ki Baat sessions. The similarities in the content also indicate that the aim of Mann Ki Baat is to reach the part of the Indian population that does not use twitter but communicate with them in the same way. The monthly radio show enables Modi to reach an audience that would otherwise rely on print and other media (including radio news shows). Because these media forms would give the power back to editors and news casters, Mann Ki Baat can circumvent this and through that is immune to commentary or context. On Twitter this goes even further, the algorithms that are working on social media websites will present the user with a similar content compared to what has been consumed earlier. Through this inherent feature of social media users might end up in ‘echo chambers’ or ‘feedback loops’. An early study on the communication in social media in 2011 by Gallant and Boone claimed that this was a move away from mass media and towards a new forms of communication through feedback loops that can be controlled by one company. But it is also possible for a political movement to control communication if they are in the center of attention as PM Modi certainly is.

In sum, Modi was able to reach a level of control over the narrative around him that can only be recreated in an authoritarian state and not a liberal democracy. He started out to be known as a religious hardliner who firmly stood behind Hindutva. By using social media Modi was able to shift the narrative to his perceived economic success. He became a pro technology and development candidate and after he was elected into the office of Prime Minister, he softened his public image and even further. As I showed, Mann Ki Baat Modi tried to direct the discourse away from the ugliness of the politics and social problems to the small delights in live while at the same time trying

to empower his audience. And while Modi is the one talking, he insists that is the people who are talking, an image that he tries to create over and over again. The creation of Mann Ki Baat enabled Modi to interact with the media like an authoritarian figure or at least a very illiberal democrat, while not attacking the press personally in the same way one saw unfolding all over the world and most recently in Poland and Hungary (BBC, 2016; Than & Dunai, 2018). At this point I need the mention what is not mentioned by Modi himself, the traditional attacks on the media landscape. As the head of the Indian news website thewire.in Monobina Gupta mentioned this in an interview with the German public broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*. In the interview, Monobina told about violence against journalists has been on the rise since Modi's inauguration and journalists have been threatened when trying to publish articles that are critical of Modi or key figures of the BJP. Lastly, Monobina also mentions the threat to the news and political discourse from what he calls Hindu right-wing trolls that led to many journalists retreating from twitter (Tangen, 2017). These are the actions not of a coordinated attack on what one might call traditional journalism and media by the government directly but rather by some individuals themselves. However, when Modi decided that he speaks for all people and he is then also speaking for the ones who are using more drastic measures to control the narrative or better said destroying the traditional channels that were used for broadcast and print media. By not speaking out more strongly against it has become part of the Modi media strategy, if that is intentioned or not. This presents us now with a two folded Media strategy of the Indian PM on the one hand side, he is controlling the narrative as much as possible in the space where he can, on the other he is not interacting with the forms of media that he cannot control. This shows in two different ways, first he is not engaging in traditional media performances like press conferences and through that he is denying journalists access to the highest office in Indian politics (something that most journalists in liberal democracies take for granted) Secondly he does not speak out against the violence against journalists and hate speech on the internet for they seem to bolster his political platform.

### [A silence that speaks a thousand words – What is missing from Modi's communication](#)

One thing that has been missing so in the characterization of PM Modi as a radical right populist is what Moffitt calls bad manners. Moffit defines bad manners as the use of slang, swearing, political

incorrectness and being overly demonstrative and “colorful” (2016, p. 39). When comparing Modi to others radical right populists one can see how he is not falling into the same category when it comes to the use of clearly insulting language as it used by many radical right populists around the world. Some examples of this would be the US president Trump when he mocked a handicapped reporter (Brochers, 2017), Philippines President Duterte who joked about raping women in front of a crowd of soldiers (Reuters, 2017) or Marine Le Pen who had to face charges of hate speech against Muslims (Chrisafis, 2015). Still these comments are not missing from the radical right in India, what is different however is that these comments do not come from Modi directly but rather other party members or his supporters. For example, Vinay Katiyar BJP MP said that Muslims should leave India (Timesofindia.com, 2018). This then corresponds to tweets made by supporters who claim that Muslims are not part of India and they form a homogenous group that is violent with a direct connection to their faith as shown in a study by Chetty and Alathur (2018, p. 114). This for once shows the straight differentiation between us and them as promoted by fascism as well as the typical kind of exclusionism that radical right populism is based upon. By not dealing with these issues Modi then indirectly endorses these views.

Another topic that is missing from Modi’s addresses to the public are the various farmers protests including the long march that came to a conclusion in March 2018. This is especially important as Modi presents himself as an ordinary Indian, a country with roughly two thirds of the population living in rural areas according to the latest figures supplied by the Worldbank (2019). The farmers were protesting against their worsening conditions that led to a rapid increase in farmer suicides. For a leader who claims to represent these people it seems strange that Modi did not mention this problem in great detail. While one might be able to argue that this should be a problem addressed by the local governments, in the case of the previously mentioned march in Maharashtra, this silence has been taken up by the government: The National Crime Records Bureau, as part of the Ministry of Home Affairs published data on suicides in India with a special section on farmer suicides. However, in 2016 the last of these statistics was published. It seems that the silence of Modi is also represented by the silence of the ministry on these topics. Understanding this in the context of radical right populism and fascism means, that the propaganda that is focusing on light topics everybody can agree on is replacing important conversations about what might have led to thousands of people killing themselves (this number is derived from the last report published in

2016 that mentioned over 12,000 suicides in the farming sector in 2015 (National Crime Records Bureau, 2016)). Ignoring a problem that kills thousands of people everywhere in India and substituting that by empty talk about sports and offering water to birds can be understood as masking a serious problem by just appealing to something everyone can agree upon, this is according to Stanley the definition of propaganda in fascism.

While the style of Modi's speech might not directly revoke the same reactions as the style of other radical right populists, he in the end still related to these topics. By promoting good news and calling for the news to promote positive changes in Mann Ki Baat the problematic intention would be defined as moving away from scrutiny by the media, a corner stone of liberal democracy, as well as covering up important issues that threaten the lives of millions of people. Therefore, understanding PM Modi not only as a radical right populist but also as a 21<sup>st</sup> century fascist according to the definitions this thesis is based on is justifiable. Mann Ki Baat and his personal twitter should not be understood as a genuine way of promoting direct communication with his constituents but rather a tool to reinforce his radical right populist style, in terms of how he presents himself in opposition to the elite and making claims about the will of the people, and a tool to distribute propaganda. On the other hand, I have to mention that he does not proclaim the existence of a crisis himself, another stable of radical right populism and fascism. Quite the opposite is the case in reality, he tries to ignore crises and mask them. However, at the same time he is profiting from the crisis that some of his supporters are working hard to create. This way he is ignoring the crises that one might argue actually exist while not speaking out against the disinformation that orbiting on social media. In this case, his silence on the matter speaks a thousand tweets.

## Conclusion

Fascism as a tactic and radical right populism as a style share more than just cosmetic similarities, especially through the use of social media, and in the case of India also radio, as their favored way to distribute propaganda. I first showed that while there are many ways how to approach radical right populism, and populism in general all these approaches commonly base their analysis on the difference between the people and the perceived elite. Furthermore, radical right populism supplements its populism by using nationalism to appeal to the electorate. This then led to the striking similarities that that modern-day understanding of fascism has to radical right populism. By focusing on the case of the Modi led BJP in India I was able to relate communication of a radical

right populist to propaganda and demonstrate how social media and the PM's monthly radio show is masked as a real exchange between politicians and the people they claim to represent while in reality it has more in common with propaganda.

That radical right populism seems to be "old wine in new bottles". This would mean that researches could and should use the insights gained in the study of modern day populism and apply them to the fascism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and vice versa. This would open up the possibility to understand the way the fascist tactics have changed over time and what stayed similar. Furthermore, as this thesis was concerned with the supply side of politics a logical next step would be to include the demand side. Hence, questions like what perceptions of the world were held in the electorate that supported populist and fascist regimes and what conditions lead to the atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that have been missing in modern populist regimes.

As this thesis tried to show how modern media is used to spread propaganda it falls within the larger literature on the effects that social media has on modern society. However, this is not only limited to the use of social media but digitalization in general. Digitalization and social media have been used way to topple authoritarian regimes as the Arab Spring shows. At the same time within democratic societies there is little argument that the Chinese approach to digitalization is seen as oppressive and potentially dangerous (Hou, 2017). By researching what can be considered the "middle ground" in these terms, I hoped to show how a democratically elected government can use pages out of the authoritarian handbook to consolidate power. This is important to understand for multiple reasons, for once, this might include the demonization of parts of the population and a connected loss of life as can be observed in the Philippines.

By using Modi's India as the main case study, I hoped to add to the existing literature on radical right populism outside of Europe. Narendra Modi's government in India can be clearly described as populist as I have showed before even though Modi himself is not one of the few world leaders who comes straight to mind. This might be due to him not using inflammatory language, as a Trump, Salvini or Duterte are famous for. This thesis therefore has shown that it is not only what is talked about that is important but also what is missing. This means that the part of Moffitt's framework of bad manners needs to be revisited. By including the acceptance of bad manners from lower tier politicians Modi is able to keep the populist flame alive domestically while not gaining the same

image as the previously mentioned examples on the world stage. Hence, the finding of this thesis are also relevant for the study of “political silence” as a strategy. To gain a better understanding of the particular style of populism Modi is applying further comparative research is needed, especially with comparisons between western and non-western politicians on what they say and what is omitted.

This thesis should be understood not as a blanket condemnation of the politics and style of Indian PM Modi, as well as other radical right populists, but argue against that populism is this new phenomenon that only came into existence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the same time, I am not saying that radical right populism will lead to same form of government that was on the rise in Europe of the 1920s and 1930s. Still the dangers that originate from promoting an unreality are not to underestimate. As Hanna Arendt already said: “Before mass leaders seize power to fit reality to their lies, their propaganda is marked by its extreme contempt for facts as such, for in their opinion fact depends entirely on the power of man who can fabricate it” (1973, p. 350).

## Bibliography

- Abts, K., & Rummens, S. (2007). Populism versus democracy. *Political studies*, 55(2), 405-424.
- Agarwala, A. (2016). Die Anti-Professorpartei. Retrieved 16.02.2019, from <https://www.zeit.de/2016/27/afd-studie-auslaenderfeindlichkeit-wissenschaft-luege>
- Allardyce, G. (2017). What Fascism is not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept *Fascism* (pp. 35-56). Milton Park: Routledge.
- Alternative für Deutschland. (2017). Unsicheres Deutschland: Unsere Frauen haben Angst! Retrieved 17.02.2019, from <https://afd-fraktion-sachsen.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/unsicheres-deutschland-unsere-frauen-haben-angst.html>
- Anckar, C. (2008). On the applicability of the most similar systems design and the most different systems design in comparative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(5), 389-401.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. New York City: Verso Books.
- Arendt, H. (1973). *The origins of totalitarianism* (Vol. 348). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- BBC. (2016). Polish media laws: Government takes control of state media. Retrieved 21.02.2019, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35257105>
- Borpujari, P. (2018). Love in the Time of Patriarchy: 'Love Jihad' in India. Retrieved 17.02.2019, from <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/love-in-the-time-of-patriarchy-love-jihad-in-india/>
- Brochers, C. (2017). Meryl Streep was right. Donald Trump did mock a disabled reporter. *The Fix*. Retrieved 16.02.2019, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the->

- [fix/wp/2017/01/09/meryl-streep-was-right-donald-trump-did-mock-a-disabled-reporter/?utm\\_term=.a8f88141dd10](https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/bernie-sanders-and-the-new-populism)
- Cassidy, J. (2016). Bernie Sanders and the New Populism. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved 15.01.2018, from <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/bernie-sanders-and-the-new-populism>
- Cassidy, J. (2017). Exposed: Donald Trump's Sham Populism. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved 15.01.2018, from <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/exposed-donald-trumps-sham-populism>
- Chakravartty, P., & Roy, S. (2015). Mr. Modi goes to Delhi: Mediated populism and the 2014 Indian elections. *Television & New Media*, 16(4), 311-322.
- Chatterjee, P. (1986). *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: A derivative discourse*. London: Zed Books.
- Chetty, N., & Alathur, S. (2018). Hate speech review in the context of online social networks. *Aggression and violent behavior*.
- Chrisafis, A. (2015). Marine Le Pen goes on trial charged with anti-Muslim hate speech Retrieved 19.02.2019, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/20/marine-le-pen-trial-charged-anti-muslims-hate-speech>
- Clark, D. (2014). TV Interview Tips From a Former Presidential Campaign Spokeswoman. Retrieved 03.05.2018, from <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/233154>
- Clementson, D. E. (2018). Effects of dodging questions: How politicians escape deception detection and how they get caught. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 37(1), 93-113.
- Curato, N. (2017). Flirting with authoritarian fantasies? Rodrigo Duterte and the new terms of Philippine populism. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 47(1), 142-153.
- De Cleen, B. (2017). *Populism and nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Eatwell, R. (2017). Populism and Fascism. *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 363.
- Eco, U. (1995). Ur-fascism. *The New York Review of Books*, 42(11), 12-15.
- Eshbaugh-Soha, M. (2013). Presidential Influence of the News Media: The Case of the Press Conference. *Political Communication*, 30(4), 548-564. doi: 10.1080/10584609.2012.737438
- Eshbaugh-Soha, M. (2016). Presidential Agenda-Setting of Traditional and Nontraditional News Media. *Political Communication*, 33(1), 1-20. doi: 10.1080/10584609.2014.958261
- Fleck, H. (2017). Programme. *Demokratie-durch-Volksabstimmung*. Retrieved 28.08.2018, from [http://demokratie-durch-volksabstimmung.de/Blog/?page\\_id=22](http://demokratie-durch-volksabstimmung.de/Blog/?page_id=22)
- Gallant, L. M., & Boone, G. M. (2011). Communicative informatics: an active and creative audience framework of social media. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, 9(2), 231-246.
- Gellner, E. (2008). *Nations and nationalism*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.
- Griffin, R. (1993). *The Nature of Fascism*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Gusterson, H. (2017). From Brexit to Trump: Anthropology and the rise of nationalist populism. *American Ethnologist*, 44(2), 209-214.
- Herberg-Rothe, A. (2004). Hannah Arendt und Carl Schmitt–„Vermittlung“ von Freund und Feind. *Der Staat*, 43(1), 35-55.
- Hobson, C. (2012). Liberal democracy and beyond: extending the sequencing debate. *International Political Science Review*, 33(4), 441-454.
- Hou, R. (2017). Neoliberal governance or digitalized autocracy? The rising market for online opinion surveillance in China. *Surveillance & Society*, 15(3/4), 418-424.

- Hungarian Spectrum. (2018). What should we call the Orbán regime? According to some, fascism pure and simple. Retrieved 21.02.2019, from <http://hungarianspectrum.org/2018/08/19/what-should-we-call-the-orban-regime-according-to-some-fascism-pure-and-simple/>
- Hunter, W., & Power, T. J. (2019). Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(1), 68-82.
- Indian Cultural Forum. (2016). Interview: The Modi Government's Recipe for Historical Writing and Research. Retrieved 17.02.2019, from <https://thewire.in/history/interview-the-modi-governments-recipe-for-historical-writing-and-research>
- Investor's Business Daily. (2018). Deregulation Nation: President Trump Cuts Regulations At Record Rate. Retrieved 16.02.2019, from <https://www.investors.com/politics/commentary/deregulation-nation-president-trump-cuts-regulations-at-record-rate/>
- Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, 46(3), 319-345.
- Jain, R., & Lasseter, T. (2018). By rewriting history, Hindu nationalists aim to assert their dominance over India. *Reuters Investigations*. Retrieved 17.02.2019, from <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/india-modi-culture/>
- Krishnan, M. (2018). Arundhati Roy: 'We're up against a fascist regime in India'. Retrieved 21.02.2019
- Kroll, F.-L. (1996). Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsunterricht im „Dritten Reich“. *Zeitschrift für Religions-und Geistesgeschichte*, 48(2), 179-181.
- Laclau, E. (2005). *On populist reason*. London: Verso.
- Mény, Y., & Surel, Y. (2002). The constitutive ambiguity of populism *Democracies and the populist challenge* (pp. 1-21). Berlin: Springer.
- Modi, N. (2014). Mann Ki Baat, November 2014. *Mann Ki Baat*. Retrieved 28.08.2018, from <https://www.narendramodi.in/mann-ki-baat>
- Modi, N. (2015a). Mann Ki Baat, June 2015 *Mann Ki Baat*. Retrieved 22.04.2018, from <https://www.narendramodi.in/mann-ki-baat>
- Modi, N. (2015b). Mann Ki Baat, September 2015. *Mann Ki Baat*. Retrieved 22.08.2018, from <https://www.narendramodi.in/mann-ki-baat>
- Modi, N. (2016a). Mann Ki Baat, April 2016. *Mann Ki Baat*. Retrieved 03.05.2018, from <https://www.narendramodi.in/mann-ki-baat>
- Modi, N. (2016b). Mann Ki Baat, March 2016 *Mann Ki Baat*. Retrieved 22.04.2018, from <https://www.narendramodi.in/mann-ki-baat>
- Moffitt, B. (2016). *The global rise of populism: Performance, political style, and representation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Mols, F., & Jetten, J. (2016). Explaining the appeal of populist right - wing parties in times of economic prosperity. *Political Psychology*, 37(2), 275-292.
- Mounk, Y. (2018). How populist uprisings could bring down liberal democracy *The Sunday essay*. Retrieved 21.02.2019, from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/04/shock-system-liberal-democracy-populism>
- Mudde, C. (2016). Europe's populist surge: A long time in the making. *Foreign Aff.*, 95, 25.

- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2013). Exclusionary vs. inclusionary populism: Comparing contemporary Europe and Latin America. *Government and Opposition*, 48(2), 147-174.
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017). *Populism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- National Crime Records Bureau. (2016). *Suicides in Farming Sector*. National Crime Records Bureau Retrieved from <http://ncrb.gov.in/StatPublications/ADSI/ADSI2015/chapter-2A%20suicides%20in%20farming%20sector.pdf>.
- Outlook Web Bureau. (2018). We Are Democratising Nehru Memorial: NMML Responds To Manmohan Singh's Letter. Retrieved 17.02.2019, from <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/we-are-democratising-nehru-memorial-nmml-responds-to-manmohan-singhs-letter/315637>
- Pal, J. (2015). Banalities turned viral: Narendra Modi and the political tweet. *Television & New Media*, 16(4), 378-387.
- Pal, J., Chandra, P., & Vydiswaran, V. (2016). Twitter and the rebranding of Narendra Modi. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 51(8), 52-60.
- Patten, S. (1996). Preston Manning's populism: Constructing the common sense of the common people. *Studies in Political Economy*, 50(1), 95-132.
- Paxton, R. O. (2017). The five stages of fascism *Fascism* (pp. 81-103). Millton Park: Routledge.
- Payne, S. G. (1983). *Fascism: Comparison and definition*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Phongpaichit, P., & Baker, C. (2008). Thaksin's populism. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 38(1), 62-83. doi: 10.1080/00472330701651960
- Reuters. (2017). Rodrigo Duterte jokes to soldiers that they can rape women with impunity Retrieved 19.02.2019, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/27/rodrigo-duterte-jokes-to-soldiers-that-they-can-women-with-impunity>
- Rooduijn, M. (2014). The nucleus of populism: In search of the lowest common denominator. *Government and Opposition*, 49(4), 573-599.
- Sarkar, T. (2018). Who Rules India? A Few Notes on the Hindu Right.
- Saxena, S. (2016). Mann Ki Baat: Radio as a Medium of Communication by the Indian Premier, Narendra Modi. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 8(3), 520-524.
- Snyder, T. (2018). Donald Trump borrows from the old tricks of fascism *Opinion US news*. Retrieved 21.02.2019, from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/30/trump-borrows-tricks-of-fascism-pittsburgh>
- Stanley, B. (2008). The thin ideology of populism. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13(1), 95-110. doi: 10.1080/13569310701822289
- Stanley, J. (2015). *How propaganda works*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Stanley, J. (2018). *How fascism works: the politics of us and them*. New York: Random House.
- Tangen, O. (2017). Indian journalists work in an 'atmosphere of intimidation'. *DeutscheWelle*.
- Than, K., & Dunai, M. (2018). Orban's party signals crackdown after victory in Hungary. Retrieved 21.02.2019, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-election/orbans-party-signals-crackdown-after-victory-in-hungary-idUSKBN1HG1DG>
- The Economist. (2018). Jair Bolsonaro and the perversion of liberalism. Retrieved 16.02.2019, from <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2018/10/27/jair-bolsonaro-and-the-perversion-of-liberalism>

- TheMoscowTimes. (2015). The 3 Most Absurd Moments From Putin's Annual Call-In Show. *The Moscow Times*. Retrieved 22.04.2019, from <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/the-3-most-absurd-moments-from-putins-annual-call-in-show-45851>
- Timesofindia.com. (2018). 'Muslims should not even be living in this country, they should go to Pakistan or Bangladesh,' says BJP MP Vinay Katiyar. Retrieved 21.02.2018, from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/muslims-should-not-even-be-living-in-this-country-should-go-to-pakistan-bangladesh-says-bjp-mp-vinay-katiyar/articleshow/62815998.cms>
- TNN. (2018). Rahul's Rs 63,000 jacket' suits BJP's NE campaign. *The Times of India*. Retrieved 22.04.2019, from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/rahuls-rs-63000-jacket-suits-bjps-ne-campaign/articleshow/62731435.cms>
- Udapa, S. (2018). Enterprise Hindutva and social media in urban India. *Contemporary South Asia*, 26(4), 453-467.
- Waisbord, S. (2011). Between Support and Confrontation: Civic Society, Media Reform, and Populism in Latin America. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 4(1), 97-117. doi:10.1111/j.1753-9137.2010.01095.x
- Woods, D. (2014). The Many Faces of Populism: Diverse but not Disparate *The Many Faces of Populism: Current Perspectives* (pp. 1-25). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited
- WorldBank. (2019). Rural population (% of total population). Retrieved 19.02.2019, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>
- Zeit Online. (2018). Schon mehr als 700 Angriffe auf Flüchtlinge. Retrieved 17.02.2019, from <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2018-08/afd-fluechtling-fluechtlingsunterkunft-fremdenhass-asylbewerber-angriffe-rechtsradikale>
- Žižek, S. (2006). Against the populist temptation. *Critical inquiry*, 32(3), 551-574.

Word count: 15,000