Populism
A Political Anthropology Approach

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Abstract

This essay critically reviews Jan-Werner Müller's *What is Populism* and its application in the Indian debate to show the efficacy and limits of his exposition. It focuses on three points: elision of subjectivity of those who are targets of populism, neglect of religion as a key factor in populist mobilizations, and the near desertion of International Relations in accounting for populism. These points are discussed by drawing, *inter alia*, on contemporary Indian populism, especially related to pluralism, a concept that Müller insightfully foregrounds as central to populism. It is hoped that a political-anthropological approach to populism will enrich its theoretical understanding beyond disciplinary and spatial grooves.

Keywords

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1   Introduction

After Donald Trump took oath as US President in January 2017, *The Times of India* published an opinion piece by writer-journalist Amit Varma: "Why Both Modi and Trump Are Textbook Populists."[1] Citing the definition of populism in Jan-Werner Müller's book, which he describes as "outstanding," Varma wrote: "I was struck by how closely our own Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, matched Müller's definition." One by one, he enumerated Müller's seven characteristics of populism and found them all applicable to India. Varma also enumerated three things that populists do when they come to power, as identified by Müller. Varma found these criteria equally operational in India. The term "populism" in the contemporary Indian context is well established, and Indian journalists[2] and non-Indian commentators[3] are increasingly using it to describe Indian politics. Social scientists, such as Christophe Jaffrelot, Louise Tillin, Arvind Rajagopal and Ashutosh Varshney,[4] have also variously used it, the latter two without engaging with the academic literature on populism.

However, can Müller's schematic "characteristics" of populism and "things" populists do when they gain power describe the ghastly daylight murder of 15-year old Hafiz Junaid in a moving and packed train in June 2017 and the complicit silence maintained by populists, non-, anti-, and quasi-populists alike? Although located less than thirty kilometers away from the scene of murder, neither the twitter-savvy Modi nor any of his ministers in New Delhi posted any tweet, let alone paid a visit to the family of the victims of that horrific populist attack.

According to the media, Junaid was killed by the "crowd" – a term anthropologists have dealt with.[5] The use of "crowd" rather than "people" in a

1   Varma, A. (2017). "Why Both Modi and Trump Are Textbook Populists" *The Times of India*, 22 January.

2   For example, Nandy, C. (2017). "Decoding Modi: Populism and Nationalism Wrapped in Grand Promises" *The Quint*, 14 March.

3   Buruma, I. (2018). "Why Is Japan Populist-Free?" *Project Syndicate*, 10 January.

4   Jaffrelot, C. (2017). "Populism Remixed" *The Indian Express*, 24 March; Jaffrelot, C. Tillin, L. (2017). "Populism in India" In: Kaltwasser, C. et al. eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford University Press; Rajagopal, A. (2017). "The Rise of Hindu Populism in India's Public Sphere" *Current History*, 115: 123–129; Varshney, A. (2017). "Is Narendra Modi a Populist?" *Indian Express*, 23 October.

5   Ahmad, I. (2019). "Introduction: Democracy and the Algebra of Warfare–Welfare" In: Ahmad, I., Kanungo, P. eds., *The Algebra of Warfare–Welfare: A Long View of India's 2014 Election*. Oxford University Press; Mazzarella, W. (2017). *The Mana of Mass Society*. Chicago University Press.

democracy is as political as the killing itself. The "crowd" knifed Junaid and two of his brothers were severely beaten and injured. Why was Junaid killed, and why were his brothers repeatedly assaulted? It was clear – they were Muslims, they were identified by their beards and skullcaps and were humiliated for wearing them. They were insultingly labelled "Mulleys [Muslims]" "beef-eaters," "terrorists," "traitors" and "Pakistanis."[6] Junaid's brother begged for help as his blood-drenched body lay on the railway platform. The crowd observed as full-time spectators. Junaid's lynching is not the first since Modi acquired power in 2014 and a series of lynchings have occurred throughout India: Jhajjar, Jharkhand, Dadri, Latehar, Una, Alwar to Hapur. In the case of lynching in Hapur in June 2018, a video of the crowd lynching Qasim (the victim) and his cries for water and help was widely shared on social media.[7] The rumor that Muslims planned to cook beef or were smuggling cows – deemed holy by most religious Hindus – motivated most of the lynchings. There are strong connections among the recent acts of lynching, the state-directed violence such as the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom, the idea of India as a Hindu-nation-state (on which, more later) and anti-pluralism, which Müller foregrounds as the pivot of populism.

This essay makes two arguments. First, simply applying Müller's definition to Modi's India has limited efficacy because Müller's theory itself is far from perfect. Second, the term populism fails to articulate the vocabulary of those who are victims of what is called populism. To this end, I discuss if democratic discourses are capable of articulating the experience of being victim of populism at all. One key assumption of the essay is that any understanding of populism informed only by the lens of a "national" context will remain skewed. Populism exists across a number of nation-states and is thus an international phenomenon. The present phenomenon of populism can properly be situated in the aftermath of the collapse of the former USSR and the inauguration of the so-called New World Order (NWO) led by the United States and its plutocratic allies in the West and beyond. As during the Cold War when the Communists were the common enemy of the West, under the NWO Islam and Muslims were designated the terrorist-enemy of the "free" Western world.[8] The figure of

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6   *India Today* (2017). "Mob Made Communal Slurs At Junaid and His Brothers: Family" 24 June. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xz-kv51HOj4.

7   Rath, B. (2017). "We, the Cows" *The Indian Express*, 30 June; Sharma, B. (2018). "From The Ku Klux Klan To Cow Vigilantes: A Scholar Explains Why Lynching is Terrorism" *Huffingtonpost. in*, 29 June.

8   Ahmad, I. (2017). "Injustice and the New World Order: An Anthropological Perspective on 'Terrorism' in India" *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 10(1): 115–137.

enemy-other – at once outside and inside – is at the center of populism in the West and India alike.

The contemporary use of populism is very different to its original use in the late nineteenth century. First used in 1891 in the United States, populism meant a rural movement led by the educated class and targeted against urbanization and corporatization.[9] A similar terminological connotation was evident in the Russian *Narodnichestvo*. In the name of "going to the people," advocates of *Narodnichestvo* romanticized rural peasants and viewed villages as serene. There was therefore a strong association between populism and peasants or agrarianism, which was seen as the future model for the country at large (p. 18).[10]

Considering this historical background, political scientist Narendra Subramanian classifies Mohandas Karamchand Ghandi's support of peasants and opposition to urban-industrial civilization as close to populism.[11] This meaning of populism continued after India's independence. Akhil Gupta viewed Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), an organization of rich farmers, as representing "oppositional populism" poised against the discourse of "development." For BKU, rural, real India (Bḥārat) was in clash with in-authentic, modernized-urbanized India.[12] Indian sociologist D. N. Dhanagare's work on populism largely followed the same track. Influenced by Ernesto Laclau, he studied social movements encompassing peasants and tribal populations as populist.[13]

However, the contemporary use of populism, both in the West and India, is markedly different. For the purpose of this essay, what is particularly productive is the foregrounding of anti-pluralism as central to populism by Müller, a political theorist and an influential scholar of contemporary populism. I will return to this issue later.

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9   Mansfield, H. (1995). "Democracy and Populism" *Society,* July/August: 30–32; Judis, J. (2016). "Rethinking Populism" *Dissent,* https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/rethinking-populism-laclau-mouffe-podemos.

10   All page numbers in round brackets without an author's name are from, Müller, J-W. (2016). *What is Populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press.

11   Subramanian, N. (2007). "Populism in India" *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 27(1): 81–91.

12   Gupta, A. (1997). "Agrarian Populism in the Development of Modern Nation (India)" In: Cooper, F., Packard, R. eds*., International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*. University of California Press.

13   Dhanagare, D.N. (1988). "Subaltern Consciousness and Populism: Two Approaches in the Study of Social Movements in India" *Social Scientist*, 16(11): 18–35.

Before I present a summary of Müller's argument as a preface to critique, it is worthwhile explaining the rationale for my engagement with his book. In my view, its strength lies neither, as Monod states in his review of the same text, in a "rigorous definition" of populism[14] nor in its grip on the literature it dwells on. Instead, its strength lies in its generative capacity. The book offers theoretical reflections that act to unleash further debates on the theory, history and development of populism. This generative capacity goes beyond the conventional theorizations, which posit populism either as a reflection of economic discontent or as the underbelly of globalization and modernization. In contrast, Müller connects populism, and productively so, with theories and practices of democracy. By placing anti-pluralism at the center of populism, he makes it more meaningful to the practitioners of anthropology and sociology (and other disciplines) who have grappled with diversity and pluralism for long. The salience of pluralism for our own times is not merely academic; it variously informs political life in its entirety.

2   Müller's Theory: An Immanent Critique

What is Populism is derived from a series of lectures Müller delivered in 2013 at the Institute of Human Sciences, Vienna. Written in a fairly accessible prose, this slim volume comprises three chapters, excluding the brief introduction and conclusion of six and three pages respectively. Given that populism has become such a prominent phenomenon and the term itself integral to contemporary political vocabulary yet lacking in clarity, the key aim of the book is to help readers "recognize and deal with populism" (p. 2). While chapter I, "What Populists Say," addresses the definitional and analytical properties of populism, Chapter II, "What Populists Do, or Populism in Power," dwells on three features of populism in power. The final chapter discusses the causes of populism and the ways to deal with it. In conclusion, the author summarizes his exposition as seven theses on populism.

Early on Müller invokes Nietzsche to say that only that which has no history can be defined (p. 18), yet he goes on to not only define it but also defend it (p. 99). He does this through the trope of disavowal. Populism is "not like a codified doctrine" but "a set of distinct claims" with an "inner logic" (p. 10). The exposition proceeds as follows: "Populism, I suggest, is a particular *moralistic*

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14   Monod, J.C. (2017). "Review of *What is Populism*" *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 18(2): 232–234.

imagination of politics, a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified … people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior" (italics in original, pp. 19–20). As the exposition unfolds, it is explained in terms of two cores of populism: a) only some among the people are "really the people" and b) its "moralized form of anti-pluralism" (pp. 20–21). However, the specification of pluralism is mostly absent and it is not explained if it is cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious or otherwise. This lack of specificity notwithstanding, Müller views populism as "the permanent shadow" (p. 101) of representative democracy, rather than as pathological. Since there was no representative democracy in ancient Greece, there was no populism there. As should be evident, Müller's focus on the political is at once a criticism of psychologization of populism, and its reduction by many as an embodiment of a specific class.

Dismissing arguments that see populists mainly as protesters incapable of being rulers, Müller identifies three features of populists when voted to power. Populists "colonize or 'occupy' the state" (p. 44) in a variety of ways. Drawing mainly on examples from Hungary and Poland, he discusses how they change the rules of the civil service, judiciary, media and other key institutions to fill them with people they consider their own. Obviously, non-populists do this too but the difference is that populists do it "openly" (p. 45). Furthermore, based on the claim that since they represent true people and their will, the neutrality of bureaucracy or judiciary as an intrinsic principle is jettisoned under the flag of articulating people's will. Furthermore, populists come to power through clientelism and practice "mass clientelism" – the exchange of "favors by elites for mass political support" – more vigorously when in power. Corruption, the third feature, is an outcome of the practice of mass clientelism, resulting in "discriminatory legalism" (p. 46) – the same law (mis)used depending on whether the person in question belongs to the "true us" people or not.

The final chapter is devoted to explaining the historical factors for the rise of populism in the US and Europe. The most important factor, Müller writes, is that "promises of democracy … have not been fulfilled and that in a certain sense simply cannot be fulfilled" (p. 76). It is democracy's promise that people will rule, which populists claim simply to fulfil by invoking "a singular will … a singular, unambiguous mandate." Representation of the singular will is integral to representative democracy, not to the direct democracy of Athens. However, the history of representative democracy is also responsible for the rise of populism in the form of the eclipse of "party democracy" in Western nation-states. Here Müller also suggests ways to deal with populism, of which he is critical as a phenomenon and ideology. To this end, he underlines the ultimate limit of liberalism: namely, the charge of exclusion against populists extends

to liberal democrats because the latter also "effectively condone exclusion of all those not part of a particular state" (p. 80). However, he does not pursue this point further and instead focuses on formulaic responses, such as the need to engage with them as well as differentiate "actual populists" from those critical of the elites but not wedded to the idea of "authentic" people. In short, this underdeveloped chapter does not say much beyond the platitude that liberal democrats should talk with but not talk like populists. His own stated hope is that he has suggested at least some "preliminary" (p. 103) measures about how to deal with populism.

I find three key flaws in Müller's account of populism.[15] First, pre-occupied with mere statements of populist leaders from many nation-states, he seldom draws on the views of those who are targets of populism. My contention about eliding victims' view of populism – if they see it as populism in the first place – has serious theoretical consequences (see below). Second, Müller's treatment of religion as constitutive of populism is, at best, thin. He implies that populism is inimical to his rather romanticized idea (rather than practice) of democracy. However, as populists themselves claim to truly represent people/democracy, the question is: whom do populists view as their enemy? Müller's answer that it is the elite is somewhat impoverished because populists too are elite. After all, Trump and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi are both billionaires.[16] The real targets of populists are thus those non-elites that supposedly threaten the culture of the "real" people. And who threatens the "Judeo-Christian culture", "homelands" or "ways of life" that populists uphold? In Western countries, the threat is attributed to Muslims who are depicted as *only* religious – indeed the most religious of all peoples, as Gil Anidjar suggests, history knows.[17] Muslims alone are seen as a problem to "integration" and "cohesion" as if Buddhists, Confucians, Hindus and people of other or no faiths lived on a different planet.

Müller reads the populist demand for Barak Obama's birth certificate as symbolizing the former US president's status as the "bicoastal elite and the African-American other" – both outside "proper" America. He leaves the issue of religion out (pp. 23–24). Despite Obama publicly and repeatedly proclaiming his Christian faith and identity, well into his second term in office,

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15   There are many other points Müller's text raises – now explicitly, now implicitly. I focus on three of them.

16   Friedman, U. (2017). "What is a Populist? And Is Donald Trump One?" *The Atlantic*, 27 February.

17   Shaikh, N. (2007). "The Jew, the Arab: An Interview with Gil Anidjar" *Asia Society*. https://asiasociety.org/jew-arab-interview-gil-anidjar.

one-third of Americans still believed he was Muslim.[18] Anders Breivik, the terrorist who killed 77 people in Norway, is excluded from Müller's text. Breivik was surely opposed to elites; but elites themselves were not his principal target. Instead, Breivik's ultimate target were Muslims whose culture, in his belief, was able to spread because the elites allowed immigration that threatened Christian Europe. The title of Breivik's manifesto itself is revealingly religious, as is the front cover, which is comprised of a red cross covering nearly half of the page.[19]

Third, Müller's prime focus is the US and Europe, occasionally he writes like an advisor to the European Union (p. 58). He has only one sentence related to India. In contradistinction to the view held by political scientist Narendra Subramanian,[20] he maintains that the slogan "Indira [Gandhi] is India, India is Indira" (p. 35) was not properly populist. The point here is not of geographical exclusion, but is rather conceptual. Müller says almost nothing about international politics and relations. For instance, he does not address the connections between populists in the US, Australia, Europe, India and elsewhere. Why does Breivik promise military support "to the [Hindu] nationalists in the Indian civil war and in the deportation of all Muslims from India"?[21] Why does he exhort Jews, Buddhists and Hindus to join, as a right and duty in the same breath, "in the fight against Islamization of Europe?"[22] What impels Breivik to view Australia's John Howard, Cardinal George Pell and others as heroes defending "Christian civilization"?[23] Importantly, what prompted the International Democratic Union,[24] headquartered in Oslo, to "unanimously" grant, in 2016, membership to Modi's party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is well known for its ethnic, exclusive and violent politics?[25]

18   Bailey, S.P. (2015). "A Startling Number of Americans Still Believe President Obama is a Muslim" *The Washington Post*, 14 September.

19   Breivik, A.B. (2011). *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*.

20   Subramanian, N. (2007). "Populism in India."

21   Swami, P. (2011). "Norwegian Mass Killer's Manifesto Hails Hindutva" *The Hindu*, 26 July.

22   Breivik, A.B. (2011). *2083*, 1385.

23   Jakubowicz, A. (2011). "Anders Breivik, Australian Anti-multiculturalists and the Threat to Social Cohesion" *The Conversation*, 27 July.

24   International Democratic Union (2016). *IDU Welcomes BJP of India as New Member*. 3 March: http://idu.org/idu-welcomes-bjp-of-india-as-new-member/.

25   For an anthropological account of Breivik, see Bangstad, S. (2014). *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia*. Zed Books; on Breivik in relation to India, see Ahmad, I. (2013). "In Defense of Ho(s)tel: Islamophobia, Domophilia and the West" *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 14(2): 234–252.

Müller's theory of populism as concurrent with the Tea Party, financial crisis and Donald Trump (pp. 9, 91) is seductively presentist. Anthropologist Don Kalb instead aptly notes that "volatile populisms commenced … around 1989."[26] The demise of the USSR left the US and the "free world" with no enemy to rally around. The demon of Islam and terrorism (interchangeable after 9/11) was fashioned to fill the void – a point made by political theorist John Keane in the wake of the USSR's collapse.[27] After 9/11, anthropologist Joseba Zulaika made a similar argument.[28] My critique of Müller is thus also a different genealogy of populism with an international frame and without which we cannot adequately grasp populism in India or the West. Below I dwell on "anti-pluralism" – "the core claim of populism" in Müller's theorization (p. 20). What Müller calls "the core" is anthropologically salutary in his formulation.

3   Pluralism and Populism in India

Müller-inspired accounts of populism like Varma's mechanically assume a "secular" conception of India separate from the religious one to which populism is assigned. This separation is central to the Indian liberal story narrated, *inter alia*, by Amartya Sen and Ramchandra Guha.[29] For instance, consider Mukulika Banerjee's[30] analysis, which understands populism as a form of nationalism – a position anthropologists from Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, Gingrich and Banks to Gusterson have maintained and who have respectively viewed it in terms of "national characteristics," "neo-nationalism" and "nationalist populism."[31] Banerjee traces Indian populism to religious nationalism in

26   Kalb, D. (2011). "Introduction" In: Kalb, D., Halmai, G. eds., *Headlines of Nation, Subtexts of Class: Working-Class Populism and the Return of the Repressed in Neoliberal Europe*. Berghahn Books, 5.

27   Keane, J. (1993). "Power-Sharing Islam?" In: Tamimi, A. ed., *Power-sharing Islam?* Liberty for Muslim World Publications, 15.

28   Zulaika, J. (2009). *Terrorism: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.* Chicago University Press.

29   For its critique, see Ahmad, I. (2017). *Religion as Critique: Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to the Marketplace.* University of North Carolina Press.

30   Banerjee, M. (2006). "Neo-Nationalism in India: A Comparative Account" In: Gigrich, A., Banks, A. eds., *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspective from Social Anthropology*, Berghahn Books.

31   Ionescu, G., Gellner, E. (1969). "Introduction" In: Ionescu, G., Gellner, E. eds., *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*. Macmillan; Gigrich, A., Banks, A. eds. (2006). *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspective from Anthropology*. Berghahn Books;

the early twentieth century in the pamphlet *Hindutva* (which literally means Hinduness) authored by V.D. Savarkar, jailed on charges of terrorism.[32] Hindutva defined Indianness exclusively in religious terms arguing that an Indian is a person who considers India as their holy land (*puṇyabhūmī*). Christians and Muslims were considered non- and anti-Indian because for them, India was not a sacred geography. M.S. Golwalkar of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu nationalist party formed in 1925, built on this ideology. In postcolonial India, this ideology was electorally institutionalized by the right wing Jana Sangh and its successor, BJP who are currently in power.

In contrast to Savarkar's ethnic Hindu vision,[33] Banerjee presents Gandhi's and Nehru's (Indian Prime Minister from 1947 to 1964) views as secular and pluralist. "It was the great achievement of Gandhi and Nehru," she writes, "that it took four post-independence decades for such enmity [against Muslims] to flourish." In her view, Gandhi shunned religious chauvinism to uphold religious pluralism. She writes: "While for himself [Gandhi] Hinduism provided a … moral framework, others who wished to follow his political ideology of *satyagraha*, Muslims such as Ghaffar Khan and Abul Kalam Azad, could choose to locate their spiritual resources in Islam …"[34]

One cannot but notice the "concession" Banerjee grants to Muslims. Muslims must follow Gandhi's ideology before they could choose Islam. As for her claim that Gandhi disavowed religious chauvinism, its non-tenability comes to the full glare when juxtaposed with the observation of anthropologist Nirmal Kumar Bose who served as Gandhi's secretary. According to Bose: "Gandhi tacitly formed an alliance with those who believed in a restoration of Hindu domination …"[35] That Gandhi's commitment to non-violence was no more than tactical and riddled with contradictions[36] is evident from his 1947 statement authorizing violence: "If later they [Muslims] betray you, you can shoot them. You may shoot one or two or a certain number… We must be brave and

Gusterson, H. (2017). "From Brexit to Trump: Anthropology and the Rise of Nationalist Populism" *American Ethnologist*, 44(2): 209–214.

32   Hansen, T. B. (1999). *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. Princeton University Press; Srinivasan, K. (2013). "Subaltern Fascism" In: Banaji, S. ed. *Fascism: Essays on Europe and India*. Three Essays Collective.

33   Chief theoretician of the ethnic ideology of Hindutva/Hindu nationalism.

34   Banerjee, M. (2006). "Neo-Nationalism in India" 246, 239.

35   Bose, N.K. (1961). *Cultural Anthropology*. Asia Publishing House (revised edition), 82.

36   Ahmad, I. (2014). "Gandhi, Palestine and Israel" *Kafila.online*, 2 August.

trust the Muslims. If later they violate the trust you can cut off their heads."[37] My point is that Savarkar's ethnic, Hindu majoritarian, anti-plural vision was not radically at odds with Gandhi's position. Based on historical-legal and ethnographic research in Tamil Nadu, Nathaniel Roberts has recently argued how a prior notion of India as a Hindu nation permeates the Supreme Court judgements and that such a notion "was not just Savarkar's understanding but also Gandhi's."[38] Nehru too did not oppose this understanding. He revealed his majoritarianism when he advocated pure majoritarianism, saying twice in span of a single minute that in a democracy "the will of the [religious] majority… will prevail."[39] Neither majority nor minority in Nehru's usage was procedural or issue-based; it was communitarian because the statement was made soon after the motion scrapping provisions for political representation of religious minorities was passed in the Assembly. The notion of "people" as a majority was thus ethnic from the start and shared, if non-identically, across party lines.

As for Nehru's secularism, Banerjee does not ask if it was the hallmark of Nehru's ideology, why did not Nehru and other "secular" figures write it in the Indian Constitution? Relatedly, why was it inserted in the Constitution only in the mid-1970s? The celebrated Nehruvian verbal secularism centered on the solitary persona of Nehru is problematic because analysts do not connect it to institutions in the absence of which it can barely exist. Nehru himself admitted how Hindus, including in his own party, were prejudiced and biased against Muslims.[40] Bureaucracy was no different. In a letter to Sumpurnanad, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, in 1959, he wrote: "We have to also remember that nearly all our District Officers and Hindus are consciously or unconsciously biased in a certain direction. It is unfortunate that so few Muslims are represented in our services now."[41] If political parties and bureaucracy were prejudiced, where did secularism live?

37   Gandhi, M.K. (undated). *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 98 http://gandhiserve .org/cwmg/VOL098.PDF, 160; also see, Kaushik, N. (2016). "How Gandhi Softened Stance towards Bose" *The Tribune*, 11 October.

38   Roberts, N. (2016). *To Be Cared For: The Power of Conversion and Foreignness of Belonging in an Indian Slum*. University of California Press, 150.

39   Jha, S. (2003). "Rights versus Representation: Defending Minority Interests in the Constituent Assembly" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(16): 1579–1583, 1581.

40   Hasan, M. (1997). *Legacy of a Divided Nation*. Hurst, 151ff.

41   Nehru, J. (undated). *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru. New Delhi*. Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund (Vol. 50, second series, edited by Madhavan Palat), 136.

Before rejoicing over Nehru's secularism, we must also account for the po-
grom in Hyderabad and the holocaust in Jammu. Officially kept secret for over
fifty years, it is now known that the 1948 takeover of Hyderabad was secured by
killing 50,000-200,000 Indians.[42] In October 1947, with RSS's active role 200,000
Muslims in Jammu were massacred.[43] To Banerjee, the liberal democracy Neh-
ru "established" "suppress[ed]...hyper-nationalist impulse" and "eschewed the
place of religion in political matters."[44] Such a liberal parroting defies conten-
tion by Peter van der Veer that "the Indian dreams of the nation always takes
religion as one of the main aspects of national identity" and "even Nehru's
version... had to accept the significance of religious community."[45] A decade
later, Amalendu Misra, while noting Nehru's cosmopolitanism, observed that
"shackled by his own Brahminic inheritance", "on occasions he [Nehru] sympa-
thized with the Hindu view of Islam."[46]

Clearly, my formulation of populism here focuses on polarization along
religious lines, namely, in Hindu versus Muslim language. I do not maintain,
however, that this is the only "fault line" in Indian politics for heterogeneity
is characteristic of any social formation. For instance, the fault lines of caste,
tribes and class (e.g., Maoist insurgency) are not absent in India. However, two
core elements of populism – Islam as "foreign" to India as a Hindu nation-state
and Muslims' alleged disloyalty to India (and "sympathy" for Pakistan, which is
at once outside and inside the state) do not obtain in relation to either Dalits,
tribes, Maoists or "Urban Naxals." In the mid-1990s, right-wing journalist Arun
Shourie wrote against BR Ambedkar, a prominent leader of ex-untouchables
(now called Dalits) and a key drafter of India's Constitution, to depict him as
"anti-national" and a lackey of the British.[47] However, this discourse rarely took
on a mobilizational form and did not impact politics in general. Importantly,
in crafting the Hindu-Muslim antagonism as *the* fault line, populists subordi-
nate other fault lines to the master fault line. In a speech made in 2014, Modi
said that Pakistan had found friends in three "AKs:" AK-47 assault rifle, AK
Antony (the then defense minister of India) and AK 49. AK 49 refers to the

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42   Aiyer, S.A. (2012). "Declassify Report on the 1948 Hyderabad Massacre" *The Times of India*,
      25 March.

43   Ahmad, I. (2016). "Review Essay – Between Mourning and Melancholia: Religion and Poli-
      tics in Modern India" *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*, 2(3): 348–357, 353.

44   Banerjee, M. (2006). "Neo-Nationalism in India," 244, 239.

45   Van der Veer, P. (1994). *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*. University of
      California Press, 23.

46   Misra, A. (2004). *Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India*. Sage, 16.

47   Gadgil, V.N. (1997). "Falsifying the Truth" *Outlook India*, 30 July.

Indian politician Arvind Kejriwal who was presented as Muslim and foreign by the BJP, coining his nickname because his first government in Delhi lasted just forty-nine days. After Modi's speech, BJP supporters circulated on social media a photo of Kejriwal in beard and turban to resemble Osama Bin Laden, with an AK-47 gun placed to his left.[48] In the speech, the choice of AK Anthony was calculated: as a Christian and minister holding the defense portfolio, in Modi's ideological scheme, he could not be loyal to India. The logic of subordinating other fault lines to the master fault line of Islam-as-problem was made clear by Joram van Klaveren, the former leader of the Dutch right-wing Freedom Party (PVV) who recently converted to Islam, as follows: it was "PVV policy" that "everything that was wrong had to be linked to Islam in one way or another."[49]

Given such constructions of Muslims as simultaneously a specific and generalized "other" in populist discourses, it is not surprising that anti-populist solidarity would include Muslims as much as non-Muslims. In his autobiography, *My Life as a Radical Lawyer*, Bill Kunstler, a well-known Jewish American civil rights attorney who defended the Black Panthers, Sikhs and Muslims remarked that Muslims would likely become "the niggers of our age."[50] Interestingly, prisoners at Nazi camps were described "as the Muslim, der Musalmann."[51] In the US, one response to American populism directed against Muslims as much as the Latinos has been many among the latter embracing Islam on their own.[52]

Following Müller, if anti-pluralism constitutes the core of populism, my point, in contrast to Varma's and Banerjee's, is that it began much earlier and proponents of Savarkarite ideology and those of Gandhi and Nehru shared it, albeit in varying degrees.[53]

48   Sethi, M. (2017). "Modi and the Specter of Terrorism: Crafting the Hindutva Icon" In: Ahmad, I., Kanungo, P. eds., *The Algebra of Warfare–Welfare: A Long View of India's 2014 Election.* Oxford University Press, 105–106.

49   Schaart, E. (2019). "Dutch Former Anti-Muslim Politician Converts to Islam" https://www .politico.eu/article/former-dutch-anti-muslim-politician-converts-to-islam-joram-van -klaveren/.

50   Cited in: Mahmood, C. (2001). "Terrorism, Myth and the Power of Ethnographic Praxis" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 30(5): 520–545, 522.

51   Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.* Stanford University Press, 185.

52   Arriage, A. (2018). "In Chicago and Elsewhere, Latinos Converting to Islam" *Chicago Sun Time,* 30 May.

53   Of the many elements particular to the contemporary Indian right wing populism, one is that it is practiced, to use Müller's word, "openly." This open practice is informed crucially by international politics. For instance, in Britain Islamophobia "passed the dinner-table

4   Inhumanity under the Cloak of Humanity: The Sub-human Junaids

I do not mean that all characteristics of Müller's populism already existed and there is nothing new in contemporary moments. As alluded to earlier, 9/11 marked a new phase in the definition of "people" around the axes of "terrorism" and "humanity." In a televised debate soon after 9/11, Modi hailed the Indian media for speaking the "truth" when it used the phrase "Islamic terrorism." He opined that terrorism was innate to Islam (less emphatically also to Christianity), for it did not consider other religions to be true. In his view, the "whole world" had witnessed terrorism "for 1400 years" [since Prophet Muhammad's time]. He saw the post-9/11 era as a battle between "humanity" and "terrorism." Read Modi's exchange with journalist Rajdeep Sardesai:

> Sardesai: Why don't you give one assurance that [when] there will be an election campaign in UP [Uttar Pradesh, the largest state] you will not use the incident [9/11] … to stir a communal divide, to label every Muslim in this country as … an Islamic terrorist?

> Modi: It is a tragic condition in my Indian media that [there is] such a challenge to the humanity and we are talking about footpath politics? What are we doing? … When people are talking about the challenge to humanity, we are talking about UP politics.[54]

The humanity Modi spoke in the name of did not exist as a prior idea. It was manufactured through the disingenuous discourse of terrorism his party put on international stage to enact Schmittian politics of friend pitted against enemy. In the same television debate, Modi said:

> See, because of India's initiative in the UN meeting twice, we have made terrorism an issue. Due to this, we have succeeded in dividing the country into two camps: those who are against terrorism and those who are in support of terrorism. I think that the recent incident in America [9/11] will intensify it [the division]. The world is about to be divided (*batnē*) into two parts: those who are in favor of humanity and those who are against humanity.

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test" to be become "normal." See, *The Guardian* (2011). "Lady Warsi claims Islamophobia is now Socially Acceptable in Britain" 20 January.

54   *YouTube* (2013). "Narendra Modi on Islamic Terrorism on Big Fight after 9/11 Attacks" 22 September. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fas-jaaZWWM; Translation into English is the author's.

Müller does discuss polarization as constitutive of populism; but he fails to connect its articulations across nation-states within an international frame as Modi was able to do. The notion of politics as fashioning and demarcating "friends" from "foes" is central to this international framing.[55] Importantly, this polarization along the axis of "friend" and "enemy," contra Müller (pp. 21–22),

FIGURE 1   Photo of Junaid "lynched on a train, moments before his death"[56,57]

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55   Schmitt, C. (1996). *The Concept of the Political.* Chicago University Press.
56   Photo courtesy https://countercurrents.org/2017/06/26/lynching-of-muslim-youth-junaid/?fbclid=IwAR0p0DSsNRhApYrTBhJKCwpwN7LtasAIHABbgGgKcoDKsSH_Jx8w9KQJ-2Q
57   *New Indian Express.* (2017). "Junaid Khan Mob Lynching: Notice Sent to Haryana Government, Railways" 26 July.

is not simply in terms of "real" or "true" people populists claim to speak for. It is between humanity and its enemy, which is simultaneously anti-human, non-human, sub-human and less than human.

In the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom, which Modi presided over as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, over 3,000 Muslims were killed with absolute complicity of the state.[58] For a long time, he maintained a silence over the killings. When he eventually spoke, Modi compared the killing of Muslims to puppies being run over by a moving car [literally, "child of dog" as the Hindi/Urdu phrase was "*kutē ka bachcha*," a slur phrase].[59] In this phrase, Modi transferred Muslims from human to the kingdom Animalia, which partly explains why hundreds of people at the railway station did not even see Junaid's dead body.[60] Populism, therefore, is too wandering and too light a term through which to grasp the sheer ferocity with which the crowd killed Junaid, the chosen apathy by the public and its trivialization and invisibilization by the mainstream media. Junaid's mother, Saira, was told of his murder after she had broken her Ramadan fast. She responded to the news of Juanid's murder only with a few words,[61] those words did not include populism. Can democracy understand the tears and moaning through which Saira spoke?

5   Tears that Exceed Democracy

Given the recent interest in the subject of emotion and populism,[62] analytically it is gainful to compare the tears of Saira with those of Modi.[63] Notably,

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58   Ahmad, I. (2013). "Modi as Future Indian PM? Development, Camp and the 'Muslim Vote'" *openDemocracy*, 30 November; Thapan, M. (2010). "Imagining Citizenship: Being Muslim, Becoming Citizens in Ahmedabad" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 50(3): 45–50, 45.

59   Bhowmick, N. (2017). "As India's Muslims Are Lynched, Modi Keeps Silent" *The Washington Post*, 28 June.

60   Sethi, A. (2017). "Why 200 People Did Not See a Dead Muslim Teenager on a Railway Platform in North India" *Scroll.in*, 27 June.

61   *Catch News* (2017). "Ballabhgarh Lynching: Junaid Khan's Mother on Her Son's Death" 26 June. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Zn6LfLFg-8.

62   Demertzis, N. (2006). "Emotions and Populism" In: Clarke, S. Hoggett, P. Thompson, S. eds., *Emotions, Politics and Society*. Palgrave Macmillan; Canovan, M. (2002). "Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy" In: Mény, Y., Surel, Y. eds., *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*. Palgrave Macmillan; Comaroff, J. (2011). "Populism and Late Liberalism: A Special Affinity?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 637: 99–111.

63   These writings focus on ressentiment, resentment and anger, not on tears. For an overview of the affective turn in anthropology, see: Beatty, A. (2013). "Current Emotion

Saira's tears as incomprehensible, even foreign, to democracy are markedly different from those of Modi. Modi's tears are not only comprehensible but also constitutive of his style of populism. The difference between the two operates primarily along the Schmittian lines of enmity at the heart of BJP's and Modi's politics: Saira is part of the community considered inimical to the people who are supposedly "authentic" and "natural" to India as a Hindu nation. So far, Modi has not apologized, let alone shed tears, for the victims and survivors of the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat.[64] On the contrary, he decried the very existence of relief camps for the pogrom survivors as the place where "they [Muslims] keep giving birth to long ques [sic] of children" and "we must teach a lesson to those who multiply like this."[65] The two times when Modi cried were occasions of electoral triumph. He choked with deep emotion when, after the May 2014 election results, he was elected as the leader of the BJP parliamentary party to become the Prime Minister. In December 2017, Modi broke down as he addressed BJP Members of Parliament after his party's consecutive sixth victory in the Gujarat assembly elections. According to journalist Pragya Kaushika, "uttering 'Gujarat' brought tears to Modi's eyes." In his speech, Modi recalled how the former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee "patted him on his back many times after the BJP won a majority in Gujarat in the 1990s."[66] That the BJP led by Modi secured consecutive electoral majority due, at least in part, to its very anti-minorities polarizing politics went unmentioned, as did the sufferings and tears of thousands rendered homeless in the wake of the pogrom. The contrast between Modi's tears emanating from electoral triumphs and Saira's tears, emanating from utter helplessness and disempowerment could not be starker. If Modi's analogy of Muslims as puppies were applied to the case of Saira, it follows that Modi's tears are reserved for the "authentic" people who constitute the Hindu nation and which democracy validates and stages every fifth year. Modi's tears, therefore, do not extend to the kingdom Animalia to which Saira and Junaid supposedly belong.

Research in Anthropology: Reporting the Field" *Emotion Review*, 5(4): 414–422; Lutz, C., White, G.M. (1986). "The Anthropology of Emotions" *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15: 405–36. Seldom do such works discuss tears from the framework used here, certainly not in the specific context of Indian politics.

64   Giri, A.K. (2017). "Poetics of Development" *International Journal of Social Quality*, 7(1): 36–52, 51.

65   Dionne Bunsha cited in, Ahmad, I. (2019). "Introduction: Democracy and the Algebra of Warfare–Welfare" In: Ahmad, I., Kanungo, P. eds., *The Algebra of Warfare–Welfare: A Long View of India's 2014 Election*. Oxford University Press, at 27.

66   Kaushika, P. (2017). "Wednesday Has Just Begun and Narendra Modi Has Cried Three Times Already" *The Print*, 20 December.

One may note another difference: namely, the nature of the occasions when Modi and Saira cried. While Modi turned emotional in formal, public meetings preplanned as televised events, the occasion of Saira's crying was neither planned nor in the presence of the invited mainstream media. My suggestion is not that Modi's tears are only performative. It is worth stressing, however, that in other cases of mediatized, planned, political events, acts of crying were a pure performance. To rationalize the 1991 invasion of Iraq, then US President George Bush Sr. invoked the testimony given to the Congress by fifteen-year old girl Nayirah. In October 1990, she "documented" the horrors she had witnessed after Iraq invaded Kuwait. As she testified, she broke down many times: "I saw the Iraqi soldiers come into the hospital with guns. They took the babies out of incubators, took the incubators and left the children to die on the cold floor. It was horrifying." Hill & Knowlton, an American public relations company hired to canvass for the US military intervention, had "coached" Nayirah to give the false testimony.[67] That Nayirah was not an ordinary Kuwaiti but the daughter of the then Kuwaiti ambassador to the US was concealed at the time.

In 2015, Modi again cried in front of a crowd of 17,000 in San Jose, California, where he held a conversation with Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook. When the latter asked Modi about his family, his voice got choked up as he recalled his mother who "worked in neighbors' homes cleaning dishes, filling water." Modi went on to add that "there are thousands of mothers who have given up their whole lives for the dreams of their children."[68] Let us set aside the fact that there is no evidence, as stated by Modi's biographer Nilanjan Mukhopadhya, to substantiate Modi's claim that his mother worked as a domestic servant. What is striking, however, is that while Modi spoke of mothers who sacrificed their lives for the future of their children he maintained an eerie silence about a mother like Saira whose son was killed because of the very social climate unleashed by Modi's politics. Analytically, no less important is the fact that instead of Modi's mother speaking herself, she is merely spoken about in Modi's speeches. In fact, there is little credible information about Modi's mother in the public domain. While there are videos about Modi getting emotional about his mother, there is hardly any video in which she herself speaks and probably none in which she cries. I make this claim based on the Google

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67   *Democracy Now*. (2018). "How False Testimony and a Massive U.S. Propaganda Machine Bolstered George H.W. Bush's War on Iraq" 5 December; Knightley, P. (2001). "The Disinformation Campaign" *The Guardian*, 4 October.

68   *The Washington Post* (2015). "Indian Prime Minister Modi Cried at Facebook. Here is Why" 28 September.

FIGURE 2   A billboard in Calicut, Kerala, in 2013 in which Modi invokes the divine-national power (lion, the vehicle of "warrior goddess" Durga visualized as mother India)[69] and Vivekananda, a modern hyper-nationalist icon for Hindus across party lines.
PHOTO: IRFAN AHMAD

search I conducted using the search phrases "Hiraben [name of Modi's mother] Modi" and "Hiraben Cry" on 1 February 2019. Parenthetically, it ought to be noted that, unlike Muslims, Hindu nationalists imagine biological mothers as

69   Ramaswamy, S. (2010). *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India*. Duke University Press, 63. The text in Malayalam reads: "You are not a sinner, you have no worries: You are the storehouse of power. Arise, Awake, and Radiate your Divinity–Swami Vivekananda." I thank Salah Punathil for translating it into English.

synonymous with mother goddess in whose image India becomes identified as a Hindu nation.

In the act of transference to the kingdom Animalia described above, there also lies a divine logic. In addition to Modi's self-claim that he is chosen by God, his followers such as Lokesh Chandra, chairperson of Indian Council for Cultural Relations, regard Modi as God.[70] In his New York speech at Madison Square Garden in 2014, Modi described the electoral verdict making him Prime Minister as divine. He proclaimed: "*janata jan janārdan.*" As media sociologist, Arvind Rajagopal, reads it the phrase suggests that "the will of the people prevails over the world" in that people themselves are God because *janārdan* denotes the Hindu god Lord Krishna.[71] Thus, unlike "secularism" which Savarkarites like L. K. Advani and Modi describe as "pseudosecularism,"[72] "pseudo-democracy" remains unthinkable for Modi and his umpteen followers.

6   Concluding Remarks

My critique of Müller's exposition and its application to India by no means implies my wholesale disagreement with him. As already stated, in making pluralism central to theorization of populism, Müller at once deepens and broadens the concept. I only agree with Müller's scarce sentences like these: "One implication of the analysis presented in this book is that National Socialism and Italian Fascism need to be understood as populist movements ..." (p. 93). Are populism and fascism, then, substitutes? Müller does not pointedly address it thereby leaving it for readers to speculate.

To conclude, populism as a term refers primarily to what populists are opposed to –the "elite" and the "corrupt." However, it is equally important to attend to what they stand for. To maintain, as Dutch political scientist Cass Mudde does, that fascism is built on a "holistic view" informing every domain of life and populism lacks that holism[73] is to miss the key dynamics of populism in India. At stake in India currently is not simply the Modi's regime's opposition to Lutyens' Delhi symbolizing the elites. It is also about regulating

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70   *The Hindu.* (2014). "I have Been Chosen by God: Modi" 24 April; *First Post* (2014). "PM Modi is God, Greater than Gandhi: New ICCR Chairman Lokesh Chandra" 4 November.

71   Rajagopal, A. (2017). "The Rise of Hindu Populism," 129.

72   Tripathi, A. (2013). "Do Not Let India Lose to Pseudo Secularist and Fake Nationalist" *The Times of India*, 20 November.

73   Friedman, U. (2017). "What is a Populist?"

everyday life of interpersonal relationships, which underlines the fact that it also possesses a holistic view. Alongside Hindu nationalists killing Muslims for exercising their dietary freedom by consuming beef, the heated issue of the so-called love jihad or Romeo jihad reflects the holistic view of Indian populism. Rumors, spread by the media, say that Muslim "fundamentalists" have plans to convert Hindu women through fake romance (hence the neologism of "love jihad"). In places such as Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka, various fronts working for Hindutva have organized meetings and distributed pamphlets against the danger of "love jihad." Such propaganda tells the public that Muslims receive foreign funding to lure Hindu girls. In some instances, cases have even been filed in courts against "love jihad."[74] Such a concern about Hindu girls on the part of Hindu populists resonates with *Mein Kampf* according to which: "The … Jewish youth lies in wait for hours on end, spying on the unsuspicious German girls he plans to seduce"[75] and "… uncouth Jews seduc[e] … innocent Christian girls and thus adulterat[e] … their blood."[76]

It is high time that scholars in general and anthropologists in particular begin to pay more attention to populism as a social-cultural phenomenon, beyond the usual construal of it as a mere electoral mobilizational issue. In this endeavor, as I see it, there are more shared conceptual-ethical grounds than polar differences between political anthropology and public anthropology approaches. Notwithstanding the diversity of nomenclatures – action anthropology, engaged anthropology, public anthropology, applied anthropology, decolonial anthropology, advocacy anthropology,[77] the definitional debates over each of them, and who first coined "public anthropology" – issues of ethics and justice and concerns about domination and power variously inform them all.[78] If political anthropology is public in that it ethically and politically

74   Gupta, C. (2009). "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad and Conversions" *Economic and Political Weekly,* 44(51): 13–15.

75   Pulzer, P. (1964). *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*. Harvard University Press, 58.

76   Shirer, W. (1960). *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*. Simon & Schuster, 26.

77   Bangstad, S. (2016). "Anthropological Publics, Public Anthropology: An Introduction" In: Bangstad, S. ed. *Anthropology of Our Times*. Palgrave Macmillan; Fox, R. (1996). "Editorial: Going Public with Anthropology" *Current Anthropology*, 37; Vine, D. (2011). "Public Anthropology in Its Second Decade: Robert Borofsky's Center for a Public Anthropology" *American Anthropologist*, 113(2): 336– 340.

78   Anthropologists' involvement with the military, as in the Human Terrain System and in the "War on Terror," is problematic. An example of it is: Simons, A. (2006). "Making

addresses issues beyond and within the academic silo,[79] public anthropology is likewise political in that it aims, among others, to confront "conditions of violence, inequality, and injustice" to "generate public awareness and have an impact on political change."[80] Whether one opts for political or public anthropology, we cannot proceed meaningfully with the prior, standard notions of anthropology, public or the political.[81]

Acknowledgements

Enemies: An Anthropology of Islamist Terror, Part –1" *The American Interest*, 1(4): 1–18. So are the notion of "warrior intellectuals" or anthropologists as spies; see Albro, R. 2010. "Writing Culture Doctrine: Public Anthropology, Military Policy and World-Making" *Perspectives on Politics* 8(4): 1087–1093; Borneman, J., Masco, J. (2015). "Public Anthropology: Anthropology and the Security State" *American Anthropologist*, 117(4): 781–785.

79 For my take on political anthropology, see three of my columns titled "Renewing Political Anthropology": Ahmad, I. (2018). "Is Political Anthropology Dead?" *Anthropology News online*, 26 February; (2018) "On the Absence of Political in Four-Field Anthropology" *Anthropology News online*, 22 March; (2018) "Twentieth-Century Faces of Anthropology's Holism" *Anthropology News online*, May 18.

80 *Public Anthropologist.* (2019). "Overview" https://brill.com/view/journals/puan/puan-overview.xml.

81 For instance, a standard notion of anthropology equates it with ethnography. Thus, Mc-Granahan's contention that "public anthropology is an ethnographic research endeavour", is mistaken. McGranahan, C. (2006). "Introduction: Public Anthropology" *India Review*, 5(3/4): 255–267, 256. For an anti-standard view, see Ingold, T. (2008). "Anthropology is Not Ethnography" *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 154: 69–92.