State of the Art Article

"The people" and their social rights: what is distinctive about the Populism-Religion-Social Policy nexus?

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Abstract

The aims of this review article are two-fold: (1) to set out the key theoretical trends in the study of religion, populism and social policy as antithetical concepts that also share common concerns; (2) to re-assert the relevance of social policy to the social and political sciences by making the case for studying outlier or indeed rival topics together - in this case populism and religion. social policy Social p scholars do not necessarily associate these two topics with modern social policy, yet they have a long history of influence on societies all over the world; populism is also especially timely in our current era. The article contributes to the literature by: (a) helping social policy better understand its diverse and at times contradictory constituencies; (b) contributing to a more complex and inclusive understanding of social policy and therefore, social welfare. In setting out the state-of-the-art, the article also draws upon research on social policy which spans various continents (North America, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and Latin America) and a preceding paper collaboration by the authors on religion and social policy (Pavolini et al., 2017).

Keywords: Populism, Latin America, Islamic populism, religion, Christianity

Introduction

Within this themed section of *Social policy and Society* that explores the relationship between populism, religion and social policy around the world, the aims of the present article are two-fold: (1) to review the key theoretical trends in the study of religion, populism and social policy as antithetical concepts which nevertheless share common concerns; (2) to re-assert the relevance of social policy research to the social and political sciences by making the case for studying outlier or indeed rival topics together - in this case populism and religion. Populism and religion are not randomly chosen issues (as discussed in the Introduction to this themed section): social policy scholars do not necessarily associate them with modern social policy yet they have a long history of influence on societies all over the world; populism is also especially timely in our current era. Hence, it is fair to argue that if ever there were two phenomena that challenged more directly the secular liberal democratic heartland that the social policy profession occupies, then populism and religion appear to occupy the top spot.

To this end, it is important to clarify the context and scope of this review article. First, the article proposes to broaden and refine the scope of social policy thinking and analysis through deeper engagement with the social and political context within which social policy's units of analysis and interventions operate. Adherents of religious faiths or activists of populist movements tend to be overlooked by the social policy literature, hence the need for the topic at hand. Second, the article examines points of tension as well as complementarity between and among the three core concepts of this themed section (social policy, religion and populism). As such, the article recognises the diverse and at times contradictory schools of thought in the literatures on religion and populism as viewed from a social policy vantage point. This means that social policy the article offers a critical reading of the connections between populism, religion and social policy, rather than of each single concept on its own. social policy

From a social policy perspective, concepts or "signifiers" (De Cleen, Glynos & Mondon, 2018) such as religion and populism belong in theoretical disciplines such as sociology and political science. social policy Inroads to social theory have been made from the social policy literature such as through studies on gender, immigration, disability, and more recently digitisation, but outlier topics such as populism and religion are largely avoided or considered antithetical to the egalitarian and secular social justice enterprise of social policy. We argue here that engagement with these seemingly conservative issues is both timely and long overdue in social policy research. After all, the central principle in populism, "popular sovereignty" is also the key unit of analysis for rational, liberal democracy (Canovan, 2005, cited in Hadiz, 2018: 30). Indeed, Canovan (2004) focuses on the concept of the "people" as the heart of the concept of populism. In this vein, international perspectives especially on the topic of populism from Latin America, Asia and the Middle East help to show the connections to social justice, social movements and contentious politics (Hadiz, 2018) that are relevant for social policy in a manner, which we argue, generally remains more muted in the European context. Our argument here is that the historical conjuncture we face necessitates a reappraisal of these issues due to the apparent crisis of liberal democracy and the wave of economic crises that have faced the globe since the mid-2000s. Crisis is often a pre-cursor for populist retaliation and mobilisation (Brubaker, 2017). As we write, the Covid-19 health emergency is unfolding and although examples of both state, societal and corporate solidarity have emerged in all corners of the globe, it will be important to consider the implications for protectionist or populist mobilisation thereafter (also noted in Mudde, 2020).

Thus, the article contributes to the literature by: (a) helping social policy better understand its diverse and at times contradictory constituencies; (b) contributing to a more complex and inclusive understanding of social policy and therefore, social welfare. In setting out the state-of-the-art in this article, we also draw upon our own empirical research on social policy in various world regions and a previous collaboration on religion and social policy

(Pavolini et al., 2017). The present article takes the next step in broadening the social justice and comparative repertoires of social policy research whose relevance grows ever stronger with the times that we live in. Far from undermining the theoretical and policy-making power of social policy, we will seek to show through this review article how the themes that fundamentally occupy social policy (such as poverty and social justice) remain relevant across the ages and as such, that the subject must not shy away from the study of topics that would normally be considered counter-intuitive within the field. We home in on two subjects, which are of common concern to both populism and religion, and which are highly normative: *ordinary people* and their rights to *social justice*. These are also core categories of analysis that motivate social policy as a field of study and practice.

The article starts by examining how populism has been classified in the literature (in order to pull out the relevance for social policy. There are various expressions of populism that emerge, namely: economic insecurity by populations left out of the global economic mainstream; a cultural backlash against immigrant populations; anti-elite and anti-expert reaction by local communities who feel disconnected from liberal democratic politics; and finally, a potential threat to the democratic policy process that underpins effective social policy making social policy. On this point, the article is cognisant of the concerns expressed by contemporary analysts about the over-use of populism to refer to all forms of discontent with traditional, "mainstream" political parties. These authors emphasise the need to study "discourse about" populism and not to lose sight of the more important contemporary political crisis caused by the "anti-populist" and anti-political orientation of the present neo-liberal era (Dean and Maiguashca, 2020; Katsambekis, 2015; Stavrakakis et al. 2018).Some of these arguments draw from Laclau's argument that populist mobilisation is no different from day-to-day politics.

This article engages with the latter debate to the extent of acknowledging that populism is a sign of a political crisis and that its outcomes can be both negative and positive for the democratic process, as argued by Tormey (2018). Tormey (2018:261) specifies that populism represents "a break with "normal" politics". This is relevant for social policy in so far as the latter seeks to enable a policy-making process that supports social cohesion[1] and universal social welfare. Moreover, this argument is supported by the international case studies considered in this review article, where mass mobilisation in low and middle-income countries happens in protest against perceived global economic injustices.

The article thus proposes the option of setting aside the use of populism as a "bad" word (as argued in Canovan, 2004) and delving deeper into the social crises it is signalling: the demise of representative government, protectionism against immigration, and rising inequalities brought on in part by globalisation (Brubaker, 2017). social policy This helps to explain the strategic reading of the populism and religious welfare literatures in this article. With prudence, the article proposes that an inadvertent advantage of the current debate surrounding populism is to better appreciate the broken linkages between the common good and ordinary people. In practical terms, this can better elucidate the synergies between state and society in a reformulation of social welfare as community solidarity and social cohesion. The article is organised as follows: section one explores the definitions of populism and the concept's significance for social policy; section two explores the importance of religion in relation to the populism literature; section three address the implications of populism and religion for social policy and provides some final reflections on future research.

[1] Social cohesion is here understood in the terms first defined by the Council of Europe in 2001 as: "a concept that includes values and principles which aim to ensure that all citizens, without discrimination and on an equal footing, have access to fundamental social and economic rights….it is a concept for an open and multicultural society" (Jenson, 2010:5).

Populism: Definitions and Relevance for Social Policy

Populism is an "affective" (Dean and Maiguashca, 2020) and emotive form of politics, often described in the literature as the "low" politics (Ortiguy, 2009; Rydgren, 2004) of the "ordinary people" who feel disenfranchised and usurped (Brubaker, 2017). At the heart of this disenfranchisement is a crisis of representation (Stavrakakis et al. 2018) that pits the "people" against an enemy who is either *above* them (i.e. elites) in the social hierarchy or *outside* of their cultural community ('others' such as immigrants) – or indeed both (Brubaker, 2017). As a political signifier, Populism was first used in the 1890s to refer to the People's Party in the United States (Judis, 2016) and the rural-based movements of that time (Judis, 2016). For Zúquete (2017:3), this event was an eminently religious example of populist politics:

> *"Protestant evangelicalism was the master-frame through which this grassroots populist wave of mostly farmers and workers from the Deep South and Western states saw the main economic and political questions of its time. Their work was to reignite the lost connection with America's God-given inalienable rights, freedoms, and values that were under assault by the elites (mostly plutocrats, the political establishment, and basically every holder of power, including traditional clergy) who had iniquitously built an unjust, oppressive, and unmoral society. In this manner, "as their religious ideals shaped the way Populists understood themselves and their movement, they wove their political and economic reforms into a grand cosmic narrative pitting the forces of God and democracy against those of Satan and tyranny."*

Over time, populism has been used to refer to a range of political leaders on both left and right in the USA, such as Ross Perot, Pat Buchanan, Bernie Sanders, and Donald trump (Judis, 2016). By the mid-20th century, the relevance of populism in the literature had spread to other parts of the world, namely: Latin America where it was used in a modified way to refer to the non-Marxist labour movements led by Perón in Argentina, Vargas in Brazil and Chávez in Venezuela; and in Europe, where it has taken on its most pejorative and hostile form to refer to nationalist, anti-communist, or Fascist regimes (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2018; Hadiz, 2014; Müller, 2016). Historically therefore, populism has been a chameleon-like concept, mostly associated with Europe and the Americas (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2018), but also existing in other forms throughout the world that have been poorly accounted for in the literature.

Typologising populism based on local geographical context has been a key marker of the literature, as illustrated by leading authors in this field, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018:2), who identify three major orientations in the definition of populism:

> "*agrarian populism in Russia and the USA at the turn of the nineteenth century; socio-economic populism in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century; and xenophobic populism in Europe in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries"*

However, they also recognise that ideal-types of populism they propose are limited by their geographical affinities and time-dependent features. Beyond Europe and the Americas, the more recent literature on populism cites countries that are home to the major religions of the world such as Hindu Nationalism in India, the fine line between Islamism and Islamic populism in Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, and Egypt, and Jewish populism in Israel (Hadiz, 2014; Zúquete, 2017). In all these cases, the distinctive attribute of populism lies in the primacy of the "will of the people" as the cornerstone of political action and the *"vertical opposition between two homogeneous, fundamentally antagonistic groups that are judged differently: the people, who*

are exalted, and the elite, who are condemned" (Woods, 2014: 3–5, cited in Nilsson De Hanas & Shterin 2018). Accordingly, populists' countries are often considered by them as promised lands where 'the people' have sacred rights.

The theoretical approach that has dominated since the 1980s is that of Mudde (2004:543) who offered the well-known definition of populism as follows:

> *"a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people'….Unlike 'thick-centred' or 'full' ideologies (e.g. fascism, liberalism, socialism, etc.), populism has a restricted morphology…. populism can take very different shapes, which are contingent on the ways in which the core concepts of populism—the people, the elite, and the general will— appear to be related to other concepts."*

Accordingly, populism is a political phenomenon that exists in conjunction with other more complex and mainstream political orientations such as neo-liberalism or socialism, hence the possibility of having both left or right-wing populists, or indeed or having religiously oriented populists. Mudde's (2004) classification falls within the ideational school of thinking and was rivalled by others that emphasise the organisational or discursive facets of populism (Hadiz, 2014). Of these three orientations, the organisational perspective has been the least expansive in the European context but one its key proponents, Mouzelis (1985: 342) noted that the distinctive characteristic of populism lies in the "systematic attempts to by-pass the institutions of representative politics." The anti-establishment rhetoric inherent in terms such as "the [Washington] swamp" in the USA, or the preference for referenda rather than the more protracted due process of democratic politics (Corbett and Walker, 2019) are examples of this orientation. Thus, populism is a form of "political practice" involving social movements and contentious politics as argued by Jansen (2011: 81), with particular reference to Latin America. This is also argued by Dean and Maiguashca (2020), who advocate for renewal of the study of populism through the adoption of more inductive bottom-up research. It is the discursive approach that has been most influential in European studies on populism, as best exemplified by the work of Ernesto Laclau (the foremost theoretician of populism) (Dean and Maiguashca, 2020). Here, populism highlights deeper concerns with the nature of liberal democracy, considered itself a barrier to freedom and equality in contemporary society (Priego, 2018); populism has an emancipatory role. Influenced by Latin American populism and American history, Laclau (2007) went against the grain of the mainstream European understanding of populism by emphasising its emancipatory qualities.

A leftwing political theorist, Laclau identified political fault-lines between the "underdog" and the powerful which he referred to as the logics of difference and equivalence (Judis, 2016). In this view, populism is not restricted to a racist, nativist, or fascist ideology of the far right. As argued in Judis (2016), the framework provided by Laclau and some of his contemporaries such as Mouffe remains relevant today in that it helps to demonstrate how contrasting political actors such as the Spanish socialist movement, Podemos, France's National Front, as well as both the Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump 2016 presidential campaigns all had populist features. For Laclau, leftwing populism is the best successor for the politics of the older socialist, social democratic and labour parties (as argued in Judis, 2016). This approach, we argue, deserves greater attention in the social policy comparative social policy literature.

More recent attempts have also taken place to further clarify the theoretical remit of populism. Moffitt and Tormey (2014:381) propose the term '*political style*', which places

political behaviour at the forefront of the definition of populism and highlights its reliance on *"performative elements such as gestures, emotional tone, imagery and symbolism"*. According to these authors, *'political style'* is an all-encompassing term that subsumes all the different definitions of populism offered in the literature since the 1980s. Thus, it poses the most marked departure from the dominance of Mudde's "thin-centered ideology" definition. Brubaker (2017) builds on this orientation by developing the concept of repertoires. Further credence is given to the definition of *political style* in Nilsson De Hanas and Shterin (2018), who observe that, sometimes, a *populist style* can be adopted by leaderless movements, as occurred in the 2009 Swiss campaign against Muslim minarets, which was run by a loose grouping of individuals associated with the Swiss People's Party.

A main strand of critique towards the concept of populism is the limited nature of comparative studies, especially beyond Europe and the Americas (Margalit, 2019). Margalit (2019) further argues that the Latin American literature on populism is the most advanced in terms of building a more multi-dimensional analysis of populism. Hadiz (2014) is one of the few authors who has studied Islam and populism in Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt. This taps into an already healthy interest in political Islamic and Islamic extremism in the literature, which we will review in the next section. Margalit (2019) argues that in Mudde's (2002) influential definition, there are three types of "thin-centered" populist ideologies whose overarching framework remains the troubled situation of liberal democracy in advanced Western capitalist societies: *(1) agrarian populism (involving agrarian populists opposed to urban elites and centralising tendencies and the material basis of capitalism), (2) economic populism (stressing economic policy issues) and, (3) political populism ('politicians' populism' usually, although not exclusively, referring to nationalist beliefs).* In seeking to surpass this micro-level of conceptualization, Margalit (2019) looks to comparative research on populism in the Americas, Europe, and Asia-Pacific that examines differences among various populisms based on conflicts surrounding the socio-economic development context of specific countries. In this sense, Margalit (2019) notes that immigration is a symbolic issue that has long animated European and North American populism, but is not necessarily indicative of their level of economic security per se.

This issue is also taken up in Islamic contexts by Hadiz (2014) who focuses on economic security in his examination of **"**New Islamic Populism" in Indonesia, Turkey or Egypt. Like Margalit (2019), Hadiz (2014) argues that Islamic populism expresses a grievance with socio-economic imbalances caused by globalization and as such is a much more urgent issue for expert observers than terrorism narrowly defined. It is also much more relevant to the study of global Islamic politics. Moreover, Fink-Hafner (2016) highlights how a modernization lens can provide promising lessons by studying how structural differences can aid better characterization of populism across different geographical contexts. In this view, globalisation is the core historical trend determining the nature of populism and is understood as *"the ever more encompassing, deeper and more rapid interconnections between states and societies"* (Fink-Hafner, 2016:1316). Fink-Hafner (2016) is among a range of contemporary authors studying populism outside of the traditional Anglo-Saxon frame who increasingly points to the influence of socio-economic concerns and confrontations with global Capitalism in low- and middle-income countries as factors contributing to the rise of populism. This can also be seen in the work of Hadiz (2014, 2018) on Indonesia and the Middle East whereby populist, cross-class coalitions who feel excluded from the benefits of the global economy mobilize in a populist manner to gain their share of political and economic power.

Populism and religion: What we know and where we are today

A helpful way in which to orient the discussion of religion in the literature on populism is by citing Zúquete (2017:7) who notes that: "populism's affinity *with religion [is] not in terms of essence but … of resemblance…we define populism as a political style that sets 'sacred' people against two enemies: 'elites' and 'others'".* This definition resonates with the above discussion and highlights how religion shares with populism core themes such as the inalienable rights of the people and their struggle to reinstate these (even though the motives and social values may differ dramatically between religious traditions and populist mobilization). Just as populism is generally deemed as difficult to pinpoint theoretically, so too is its religious strain. Zúquete (2017) offers one option by drawing attention to a clear correlation between types of political culture and strength of state institutions, with the rise of different kinds of religious populism: consolidated party systems that offer inclusive political representation are more likely to impede populist mobilisation than weak institutions made up of an ineffective state, a disorganised party-system, and ineffective systems of democratic representation.

Zúquete (2017:1) notes that religious populism is a subtype of populism, which can be analysed in two ways: "*(1) as an openly religious manifestation, in the form of the politicization of religion and, (2) as a subtler religious manifestation, tied to the sacralization of politics in modern-day societies."* Overt religious populism believes it is fulfilling a God-given right and that the people have a special relationship with the divinity. These populists are doing God's work on earth against Godless enemies. Covert religious populism is akin to forms of sacralized politics discussed in the post-secular literature: "*It is shaped by religion in a broader sense, centered above all on the experience of the sacred and the function that it fulfills by setting the group, with its this-worldly secular mission, apart as an absolute and transcendent force that will fundamentally change mundane everyday evil politics."* Zúquete (2017:2). Zúquete (2017) further notes that these two forms of overt and covert religious populism are not mutually exclusive and religious populism may arise from secular forms such as the identification of the European Union with a Christian heritage or the frequent references by Donald Trump to the American people being protected by God and having a special mission on earth.

Further linkages between populism and religion are identified by Nilsson DeHanas and Shterin (2018), who argue that it is the moralistic character of the political community, inherent in the populist *political style*, which lends itself well to the notion of the "sacred", "noble" or "pure" people. Hence, the connections to religious discourse become more evident. Nilsson DeHanas and Shterin (2018) employ the term 'sacred' with reference to a recent tendency in sociology in general and the sociology of religion in particular, to build on Durkheim's conceptualisation of the sacred as being ever-present in public life. This is reminiscent of the literature on sacralization and public religion and finds expression in the more recent sociology of religion literature as exemplified by Lynch (2012, cited in DeHanas and Shterin, 2018:180) who defines the sacred as *'what people collectively experience as absolute, non-contingent realities which present normative claims over meaning and conduct of social life'* (Lynch 2012 29, cited in DeHanas and Shterin, 2018:180). Hence, the concept of the "sacred" finds a natural home in the literature on populism encompassing a notion of 'salvation' in 'saving the people' (Marzouki and McDonnell, 2016, cited in DeHanas and Shterin, 2018:180).

There are deeper sociological dimensions to these covert forms of religious populism that the literature associates particularly with secular, rational Western society: the sacralization of politics which is the result of endowing politics with a transcendent nature. In their day, the major ideologies of the twentieth century (Fascism, Communism, and Nazism) were described as "political religions" (Gentile, 2006, cited in Zúquete, 2017: 7). In this sense, populist politics takes on a "missionary" quality in that its aim is to save the people and return their rights to them. Political religions are built on three major 'sacred' pillars: "*charismatic*

leadership, a moral community, and a mission of salvation." (Zúquete, 2013). Analytically, this brings political religion and political ideologies closer together. Examples are found in the French far-right party Front National (FN), under the leadership of its founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen (1972-2011), and Hugo Chávez's left-wing Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela (1999-2013).

In this vein, Brubaker (2017:380) notes that populism depends on a form of "enchantment": meaning "faith in the possibility of representing and speaking for "the people". Brubaker (2017:380) calls this an "affective investment in politics". This is diametrically opposed to faith in mainstream, representative politics and "an affective disinvestment from politics as usual" as evidenced for example in England's Brexit campaign and the slogans and speeches of Nigel Farage. As such Brubaker (2017) argues that the role of religion in populism seems to be focused on ideational distinctions between western "civilized" society and barbarism. To this end, Smith and Woodhead (2017) examine the religious profile of voters during the Brexit vote and find that those belonging to the Church of England denomination accounted for the highest proportion of leave votes; higher than the total national average and also higher than the UK evangelicals (which, compared to the North American evangelicals) are less nationalistic. Smith and Woodhead (2017) argue that Church of England voters were motivated by a concern to preserve local English heritage and prevent the further growth of immigration. Hence, the authors conclude that, although identification with the Church of England was not the main marker of the leave vote, it was certainly a significant factor in determining the way people voted.

The literature on populism and religion has mainly addressed populism within Christianity. Zúquete (2017) gives passing mention to Islam, Judaism and Hinduism. Others, such as Hadiz (2014, 2018) and Priego (2017), provide more detailed assessment of populism in Islam and how it should not be confused with Islamism. In relation to Islam, Zúquete (2016) notes that the leitmotif of religious populism is the notion of "the struggle of the "oppressed people". Islamism expresses a form of "extreme politicization of traditional religion" (Payne, 2008: 31) with many authors alluding to the Shi'a social and political revival following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini instigated a new discourse of liberation and political struggle among Shi'a communities that still has expression today in countries like Lebanon and Iraq as the "dispossessed" fighting back against the internal and external elites (Zúquete, 2017).

Hezbollah is a case in point. As argued in Salamey and Pearson (2003), Hezbollah is not only a militant guerrilla movement and a political party, it is also a resistance community, seeking to reinstate the position of the Shi's in Lebanon. This is supported in research by Jawad (2009). Hezbollah were able to gain the support of the poorer and lower socio-economic strata of the Lebanese population whose interests seem to run in contradiction with the promises of democratisation, modernisation and state-building (Salamey and Pearson, 2003). Hezbollah's power and popularity were not based on national class-based support and a revolutionary programme alone. Rather, it was also brought about by the party's ability to link its struggle to gain greater access to power to Lebanon with a wider regional network of states and groups (such as Iran and Syria) who share anti-American sentiment.

In Judaism, the ultra-orthodox Israeli political party Shas (or Guards of the Torah) also falls within the realm of religious populism and denotes an example of populist religious parties (Hawkins, 2010: 40). Shas advocates for the supremacy of the Sephardic population of Israel and of a state run by Jewish religious law. It can be viewed as a fully populist party due to its anti-elitism (mainly against the Ashkenazis), and its ability to appeal to the deprived social classes, as well as the rejection of a range of "others", namely: African immigrants, Palestinians, and Israelis of Russian descent (Weiss and Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2016, cited in Zúquete, 2017). Zúquete (2017) also notes the need for scholarship to study examples of

populism in other cultural and religious environments. Hindutva in India (Frykenberg, 2008, cited in Zúquete, 2017) or Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka (Berkwitz, 2008, cited in Zúquete, 2017) offer such examples and in this themed section Tomalin addresses these Dharmic faiths.

Hadiz (2014, 2018) has written extensively on Islamic populism. Referring to the literature from Latin America about the frustrations of the lower classes produced by the inequalities of Latin American development, Hadiz (2014) argues that Islamic populist movements are led by members of the middle class, who may be less marginalised than workers or peasants but also encounter frustration with their upward social mobility due to the hegemony of political and business elites in their countries. For Hadiz (2018), New Islamic Populism embraced and allied itself with the new poor produced by the modernisation process but was led by those social groups who were in more privileged positions within their societies, as seen in Egypt and Indonesia. They are the "lumpenintelligentsia" (Roy, 1996, cited in Hadiz, 2018). However, this cross-class coalition that underpins the New Islamic Populism is ideologically bound together by religious rather than nationalist values and symbols, inherent in the Muslim Brotherhood slogan of "Islam is the solution".

Discussing Turkey and Egypt as examples, Hadiz (2018) notes that because of the mostly middle-class composition of its leadership, the agenda of the New Islamic Populism is thoroughly modern: it seeks to reorganise power to the advantage of an *ummah* or sacred Muslim community that is increasingly diverse in its class base. This requires greater access to and say over national-level state and socio-economic resources, as well as access to and greater participation in global economic markets.

Implications for Social Policy

The conceptual and policy intersections between populism, religion and social policy have been largely understudied so far. Important questions that may arise from this intersection are how the needs of vulnerable or excluded groups are not just addressed but heard by policymakers and whether religion and populism together produce a compounding effect. There is an increasing literature that explicitly analyses social policy from the point of populism. However, few studies focus also on the role of religion. It seems a serious shortcoming for several reasons: People's welfare seems to be at the core of the populist message and this includes social protection and education. These are fields where Churches have been actively involved in many countries not only in direct or indirect provision, through associations with religious roots, but also in terms of preferred outcomes (e.g. what type of family or care should be supported). Moreover, populist parties' discourses, especially on the right, mix often nationalism and religion also when referred to social policy issues (e.g. migration as well as abortion, stem cells, etc.). Therefore, populist parties tend to use chauvinism in social policy and religion as a source of voters' identification and attraction. It has also been noted at the beginning of the article that the first forms of populist mobilization emerging in North America were of a distinctly religious nature and this is a strand of populist mobilization that has continued ever since (Zúquete, 2017). Hence, it may be argued that questions of social policy and the implications for the welfare state have been treated in the shadows (as it were) of the populist literature. Here, we make these arguments more explicit and add to the mix the important social, cultural and political motivator of religion.

In the field of public health, an important implication is cited by Speed and Mannion as follows (2017:250): "*Populist leaders pursing such policies typically try to avoid established institutional checks and balances (including the professionalised civil service) and seek to implement public policies at more pace and scale than the traditional bureau-incrementalistic approaches associated with liberal-democratic governments."* This connects with Tormey's (2018) and other's argument about populism representing "a break with "normal" politics". A

recent contribution by Peters and Pierre (2020) sheds light on the governance and public policy implications arising from the spread of populist political action. They note that populist politics is likely to weaken institutional forms of public policy and make policy more prone to politicization and patronage (Peters and Pierre, 2020). There is no space in this review to explore these arguments in more depth but Peters and Pierre (2020) highlight an important new area of research on the potential consequences of populist analysis for social policy.

In the wider social policy literature, Ketola and Nordensvard (2018) argue that the welfare context of both Brexit and the success of European far-right populism can be found in a shared crisis narrative. European social policy is now facing resurgent welfare chauvinism and identity politics whereby the populist far-right has used these discourses effectively to reframe social policy and social citizenship through a dangerous mix of arguments evoking the nation state and ethnicity. Although social policy concerns were not at the forefront of voter's minds, there are evident social policy grievances and implications: voter choice in the UK referendum was influenced by factors such as education levels, levels of labour market vulnerability and frustration among de-industrialized populations in particular that they had been forgotten by their governments whose priority was increasing national wealth and making the most of the opportunities from global trade. The now well-known UK Leave campaign bus with the caption about £350 million being lost to the Brussels elites from that NHS was a clear example of the frustrations felt by the populations mentioned above.

Both in the UK and Europe, scholars have referred to the contradictions and dual nature of the crisis facing European societies: extensive welfare state retrenchment and, in a context of accelerated demographic aging, rising costs of key social and public services such as education, health and pensions – both of which lead to dwindling social solidarity and increasing nationalist divisions. In the case of the UK, Taylor-Gooby (2012) refers to the 'double crisis'; in the wider European context, Hemerijck (2013) describes rising welfare costs and reduced government earnings as a 'double-bind' (cited in Ketola and Nordensvard, 2018). The casualty of these trends is social policy, as manifested in the apparent struggle to redefine social rights in Europe along more nationalist, conservative, and ethnocentric lines.

Ketola and Nordensvard (2018) argue that the populist far-right in Europe draws upon a notion of "nativism" and the aspiration for an ethnically homogenous nation. This narrative aspires to a return to the 'golden past' of the 1960s and 1970s, and perceives the challenges faced by the nation as being a result globalisation and multiculturalism. At the heart of this nostalgic regret is the populist far-right's aim to *"reimagine the welfare state as a welfare nation state"*, the core of which are the people, their general will and their social rights as the pure and rightful community of natives. Rather than the effectiveness of redistribution, it is the identity of the welfare state and the rightful entitlements to it that the far-right is more concerned with. social policy. This understanding directly challenges the social democratic approach to welfare that is underpinned by universal, egalitarian, and secular policies that effectively decouple services from nationality or ethnic origin (Ketola and Nordensvard, 2018).

For Corbett and Walker (2019), a way out is to revive the core idea of Social Europe, which they find encapsulated in the term *social quality*. This requires moving beyond the narrow economism of the neoliberal period and recognizing that the very real frustrations of the constituencies of social policy, no matter how unpalatable their views might be about foreigners or how attached they might be to nationalist sentiment. Rather, a more robust and empirically grounded analysis is needed to understand the complex political reconfigurations which have led to the new radical tendencies of Europe. This in turn can inform our thinking of how social policy can strengthen social cohesion and advance greater social justice. After all, the disgruntled populists want real democracy.

The concern in the contemporary European literature with preserving effective social policy social policy systems and equitable democratic processes hark back to the influential

work of Laclau, Mouffe and Canovan. Although these authors had differing positions on the potential of populism for democratic renewal, they all lamented the state of social democracy in Europe. They sought to advance new arguments in favour of strengthening the quality of a more radical democracy built on a new vision of social solidarity, rather than simply preserving the older model based on working class versus capitalist interests. According to Judis (2016), at the time of writing *Construir Pueblo,* Mouffe and Errejón (2015) believed that Western Europe had the capacity and will to move social democracy to embrace a more radical alternative. As Mouffe argued, *"we first need to restore democracy, so we can then radicalize it; the task is far more difficult."* (cited in Judis, 2016:122). Hence, there is a story to tell about the emancipatory potential of left-wing populism, which is of relevance to today's social policy debates. As Laclau and Mouffe (cited in Judis, 2016:121) argued, *"the left has to "contruct a people" not simply to represent a pre-existing historical formation such as the working class or a single cause like feminism or ecology"*. Laclau based his arguments on the example of Podemos in Spain and other similar European left-wing populists, whose underlying mission was an end to austerity.

How does religion fit into these arguments and what does it contribute? social policy This article highlights the gaping hole of ethical and moral debate in social policy, left by the weakening of liberal secular discourse that has succumbed to individualism and neo-liberalism. Whether the moral centre of social policy is called *Social Europe*, *Social Quality* or just the *"social"*, the analysis provided in this article serves as a reminder (if one was needed) of the need for social policy to reimagine a new identity for itself, and it should start by re-engaging with its marginal constituencies that now pose the greatest challenge to it. Whether these are religion or populism or indeed capitalism, they have grown to pose rival paradigms of social organization to secular liberal democracy.

Some of the research evidence shows that religion stokes populist sentiment but it interacts in different ways with socio-economic context; indeed, this is a vital relationship that needs further consideration in the literature. In the context of high-income countries, the evidence from the USA, UK, and European nations is that religion among the elites and the middle-classes strengthens their sense of national identity and aversion to immigration. The evidence shown in Smith and Woodhead (2017) points to the referendum vote in the UK as being as result of this orientation among the Church of England adherents. Religion is less of a factor among the lower working classes where Christianity may be a marker of identity rather a religious practice. Further afield in the context of Latin America, Asia and the Middle East context, the literature shows that religion has fueled populist mobilization in a range of ways across the class divisions. It has instigated Islamic populist movements seeking to reinstate the rights of the dispossessed, for example among the Shi'as in Lebanon and Iraq, the liberation theologies of poor communities in Latin America. Equally, religion has taken root among the disenfranchised middle classes in Asia and the Arab world who are seeking to gain greater access to political and economic resources in countries such as Egypt and Indonesia. In the latter cases, there is no rejection of capitalism, rather the aim is to gain a larger share of the promises of market participation in the global economy.

Perhaps the fundamental and unlikely connection that binds social policy, populism, and religion together is the central concern with the "ordinary people", their struggle for social justice and their access to their social rights. As Brubaker (2017) argues, speaking in the name of the people inevitably calls into question issues of redistribution and re-democratisation. This is the moralistic character of social organization that neither populism nor religion shy away from but is generally out of the comfort zone of social policy. Hence, in line with the favourable turn towards the study of populism as political style and repertoire, we can on the one hand recognize religion as one of the repertoires used in populist mobilization. Indeed, in seeking to explain the conditions that produce populism, Brubaker (2017) highlights the demise of

institutional mediation and the rise of protectionist populism as producing a perfect storm of crises in which populism would thrive: 2009 economic crisis, the 2015 refugee crisis, and the ensuing terrorist attacks in France, Germany, Belgium, and elsewhere in Europe. The rise of ethnic and religious diversity in European societies are has directly fueled more protectionist forms of populism, hence, we must continue to see the role of religion as one which will become ever more prominent in the populist logic. Brubaker (2017) proposes repertoires of populism that can serve as analytical models of governance through which religion can also influence social policy practice. These are: antagonistic, re-politicisation, majoritarianism, anti-institutionalism, protectionism, communicational.

We are evidently in a time of major social, economic and political flux: the old order of capitalist social democracy is being challenged by more protectionist and conservative outlooks on social policy. This is happening at a time of heightened environmental and public health concerns (e.g. climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic). Much has been said and published about the shortcomings of social policy systems, thanks to the legacy of austerity and the persistence of far-right-wing politics. Equally, more is emerging on spontaneous altruism be this in the large numbers of volunteers eager to support social care and public health systems as well as the role and capacity of the state to act as the saviour of last resort. The litmus test will be the extent to which economic behaviors can fundamentally change, and as Corbett and Walker (2019) argue, the re-emergence of a socially unified understanding of well-being that can bring societies together within and across borders. As also noted above, Peters and Pierre (2020) introduce a new angle of research focus on governance and political systems that, we argue here, is of relevance to social policy and the emphasis given within this field to questions of voice and entitlement.

Perhaps the real vocation of social policy is to develop a new discourse around a *shared humanity,* rather than "the ordinary people" and on this, religions, old and new, have much to say. Ultimately, it means that social policy as a field of theory and practice needs to get its hands dirty and re-engage with its constituencies as well as the social contexts within which it seeks to play its part.

Conclusion

This article highlights both the importance of populism for social policy in order to address the current political conjecture and also the need to bring into the mix the role of religion. Written from a social policy lens, it has engaged with the literatures on religion and populism in a strategic manner to bring out the social policy relevant issues. Populism is a "low" style of politics that thrives on emotive simplification of reality to mobilise the masses behind a sense of injustice against elites and outsiders (Ostiguy, 2009). As argued in Brukaber (2017), forms of protectionist populism are directly rooted in rising concern about ethnic and religious diversity in Europe and North America. There is also merging of concerns around the moral identity and rights of the people, expressed through their general will. These are in confrontation with the crisis of the left: large-scale immigration, economic transformations, and new waves of emancipatory liberalism can all be seen as projects of socially, economically, and culturally liberal elites. They therefore all create opportunities for populism in a double sense: opportunities for speaking in the name of "the people" against elites, and opportunities for claims to protect "the people" against threats from outside and from the margins. As such, populism depends on the possibility of "enchantment": loss of faith in mainstream politics and new faith in a new form of politics represented by the Charismatic leader. In this way, its resemblance to religion is clear. The review article has sought to show the breadth and diversity of these perspectives, cognizant the concept of populism itself is by some interpretations, merely a signifier of the democratic political arena in which we are all implicated, and which is marked with conflict by its very nature. The review shows that it is important for social

policy to engage with these seemingly antithetical topics, which nevertheless lay powerful claims on its subject matter.

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