The Spirit of Populism

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The Spirit of Populism

Political Theologies in Polarized Times

Edited by

Ulrich Schmiedel and Joshua Ralston

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Acknowledgements

Populism is a buzzword, both inside and outside the academy. An interdisciplinary and international conference held at the University of Edinburgh in 2019 sparked the idea for this volume. With the papers delivered at the conference in mind, we set out to bring together scholars who draw on political theology in order to uncover what hides behind the buzzword of populism. Doubtlessly, the public and political debates covered in this volume will have changed by the time it is published. But the arguments and analyses presented in the chapters that follow might be—or so we hope—constructive beyond our current political predicament. Concentrating on populist politics in European and American contexts, this volume aims to start a conversation about the significance of theologies for the public square and of the public square for theologies. The contributors connect scholarship from comparative perspectives that facilitate inter-religious studies, coalitional perspectives that foster inter-religious solidarities, and critical perspectives that re-formulate theology as a resource for contemporary politics. Hence, we are delighted to present these contributions as the first volume in the new series *Political and Public Theologies: Comparisons – Coalitions – Critiques*.

This volume would not have been possible without the support of the Henry Luce Foundation's Fund for Theological Education, the Christian-Muslim Studies Network, and the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Edinburgh. We are grateful for their generosity. We thank Lucy Schouten for her calm and careful support in organizing the conference that inspired this volume. Samuel Nwokoro has indexed it. We are grateful for his support. Thanks are also due to the contributors who finished their chapters in challenging times. Tessel Jonquière and Ingrid Heijckers-Velt at Brill have supported us from the moment we came up with the idea for this volume. We are grateful for their patience with us.

Ulrich Schmiedel and Joshua Ralston
Edinburgh, January 2021

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors

Ulrich Schmiedel

Populist protesters chant and carry the striking slogan "We are the people" through streets and squares in Germany. PEGIDA—*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* which could be rendered as 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of Europe'—started as small and scattered protests, but soon had spin-offs inside and outside the country.[1] The strategy of these populist protesters mixes snippets from the political right and the political left. Streamed online, the speeches of the founder of PEGIDA, Lutz Bachmann, showcase this strategy.[2] He draws a distinction between people who can and people who cannot count as 'the' people. Religion plays a role here. In the clash of civilizations perceived and produced by these populists, Christianity is pitted against Islam as much as Islam is pitted against Christianity. As the cross in the colors of the German flag that the protesters carry with them announces, the people are Christian while the non-people are non-Christian—and identified with Islam.

Although PEGIDA is losing momentum as the protesters gain representation in the parliaments,[3] the protests exemplify the specter of populism that haunts public squares and political spheres across the globe. Whether inside or outside parliaments, populism traps established politicians in a paradox. Should they include or exclude the populists from parliamentary politics?

1 My account of PEGIDA draws on Ulrich Schmiedel, "'We Can Do This!' Tackling the Political Theology of Populism," in *Religion in the European Refugee Crisis*, ed. Ulrich Schmiedel and Graeme Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 205–224. The translation of 'Abendland' is tricky. The contrast between 'Abendland' and 'Morgenland' captures the concept of a clash between 'occident' and 'orient.' See Lukas David Meyer, "Abendland und Apokalypse," *Evangelische Theologie* 79, no. 6 (2019): 424–436.

2 Throughout, all citations from Bachmann's speeches are taken from the clips on Bachmann's channel on www.youtube.com (accessed March 15, 2020). All translations are my own.

3 In Germany, the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) is channeling some of the PEGIDA protests into populist parliamentary politics. For a study of their references to religion, see Ulrich Schmiedel, "Hijacked or Hooked? Religion in Populist Politics in Germany," in *Is God a Populist? Christianity, Populism and the Future of Europe*, ed. Susan Kerr (Oslo: Frekk Forlag, 2019), 96–107.

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Including intolerant populists implies a promotion of intolerance. Excluding intolerant populists implies a practice of intolerance. Is 'populism' a buzzword that attracts so much attention because protesters like PEGIDA capture and capitalize on a paradox that characterizes liberal democracy?

In the libraries that have been filled with literature on populism, studies scrutinizing the significance of religion are still scarce. Yet one metaphor has been adopted across almost all of them—the metaphor of the hijacked faith. Scholars are in a habit of arguing that populists have hijacked religion.[4] There is no need to dig deep to find the first formulation of this metaphor. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush declared: "Islam is a vibrant faith. Millions of our fellow citizens are Muslim. We respect the faith. We honor its traditions. Our enemy does not. Our enemy doesn't follow the great traditions of Islam. They've hijacked a great religion."[5] Surely, the success of Bush's metaphor among scholars is somewhat suspect. In his account of the study of religion after 9/11, Robert Orsi acknowledges that scholars are under pressure to map the role of religion in politics.[6] "People want to be assured," he explains "that the men who flew their planes into the World Trade Center … were not representatives of 'real' … Islam."[7] Similarly, people want to be assured that the claim to religion stoked by populist politics is not 'honest Christianity' but 'hijacked Christianity,' or not 'real' religion in any case. In the academy, the coinage of "Christianism" in parallel to "Islamism" illustrates the train of thought: Christianism is to Christianity what Islamism is to Islam—a hijacking.[8] Given that affiliations with churches are few and far between among PEGIDA protesters,[9] it seems to make sense to characterize the performative and propositional references to religion in populist protests as a hijacking. Yet

4 See the influential collection *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy (London: Hurst, 2016).

5 The White House Archive has curated a selection of Bush's statements on Islam, available at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/ramadan/islam.html (accessed March 15, 2020).

6 Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 179.

7 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 179.

8 Rogers Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (2017): 1191–1226, introduced the concept into the study of populism. According to Brubaker, Andrew Sullivan coined the concept in his account of the 'Religious Right' in the United States.

9 Hans Vorländer, Maik Herold, and Steven Schäller, *PEGIDA* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), 57–58, argue that until 2015, the ratio between members and non-members of churches in PEGIDA was approximately 30 to 70 percent, thus mirroring the church affiliation of the population of Saxony, where the protests originated—very low.

the metaphor of the hijacked faith presupposes that religion is a category that can be controlled, either by its legitimate or by its illegitimate owners.

Problematizing such ownership, Laurie L. Patton points out that neither academics nor non-academics can control religion.[10] Patton argues that what is at stake with the issue of ownership is "the liberal paradox."[11] Patton's liberal paradox resembles that of established politicians who turn intolerant either by including or by excluding populists from their politics. Caught in the liberal paradox, the scholar of populism either accepts that intolerant populists can own religion (in which case it is problematic for her to argue for tolerance to be rooted in religion) or argues for tolerance rooted in religion (in which case it is problematic for her to accept that intolerant populists can own religion). The metaphor of the hijacked faith navigates the liberal paradox by distinguishing the legitimate from the illegitimate owners of religion. The assumption seems to be that tolerant religion is honest and intolerant religion is hijacked.

But what do we—by 'we,' I mean scholars of religion—do, when we analyze and assess the invocations and the interpretations of religion in the public square with the metaphor of the hijacked faith? How do our metaphors and methods hang together? In what follows, I sketch the nexus between metaphor and method in the study of populism, before I introduce the contributions to this compilation. My sketch is intended as an intervention into the growing field of populism studies that points scholars to the normativity in their methods and metaphors. I suggest that there are structural similarities between populist references to religion and the study of populist references to religion. A logic that can be traced back to Carl Schmitt lurks in the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate ownership that is drawn through the metaphor of the hijacked faith. There is a political theology in populism. Scholars need to engage with political theology, then, not in order to escape but in order to enter the liberal paradox—which is the core concern of this cross-disciplinary and cross-denominational compilation.

1 Method

Although Max Weber has had a lot of bad press in the study of religion, he was aware of the control that categories exert in the public square. Like the title of this compilation, the title of this chapter is a nod to one of his categories:

10 Laure L. Patton, *Who Owns Religion? Scholars and Their Publics in the Late Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 70.

11 Patton, *Who Owns Religion?*, 16.

"Spirit of Capitalism." What Weber himself wrote off as a "pretentious phrase" captures the frame through which capitalists view the world.[12] If political theology is interested in both how religion shapes politics and how politics shapes religion, Weber's category might be crucial for exploring the spirit of populism.

To cut the story short, Weber traces capitalism to Calvinism: "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so."[13] Yet capitalism is not identical with Calvinism. The connection between them is more complex and more convoluted than that. Citing the Puritan church leader Richard Baxter, Weber contends: "In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage."[14] Anticipating his concept of *Entzauberung*—the disenchantment or demagification of the world—Weber refers to "the elimination of magic" that is played out here.[15] Calvinism might have evaporated from capitalism, but the spirit continues to haunt the capitalist iron cage. The spirit is a bit of a specter. Weber's category of the spirit, then, allows scholars to study the impact of religion on politics without immediately insisting that it is either legitimate or illegitimate.

Weber's plea for the "value-free" neutrality of the scholar went so far that the society for the sociology of religion that he co-founded prohibited applause after lectures.[16] (I am happy to report that there was a lot of applause during the conference at the University of Edinburgh, where many of the contributions to this compilation were delivered and discussed.) In the lectures that Weber presented at the University of Munich in 1917 and 1919, he interrogated the lack of normativity in modernity. As a scholar, Weber was allergic to "value judgements."[17] In "Politics as a Vocation," however, he acknowledged the need for such judgements among politicians.[18] Schmitt, who later claimed to have

12 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992).

13 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 123.

14 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 123.

15 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 61. For the concept of *Entzauberung*, see Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 396–450.

16 See *Verhandlungen des ersten deutschen Soziologentages*, ed. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1911), 166.

17 Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129–156.

18 Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 396–450.

coined the curious combination 'political theology,' was in the audience.[19] While it can be assumed that he applauded—Munich is not the society for sociology—it might be a bit far-fetched to argue that Schmitt follows Weber in any definite or direct way.[20] Yet normativity—or indeed the lack of normativity—is at stake in scholarship on religion.[21]

According to Vincent Lloyd, a core characteristic of the work that can be subsumed under 'political theology' is resistance to reductionism.[22] Lloyd argues that political theology takes "an alternative approach" to the assumption that religion ought to be reduced to the private rather than the public sphere.[23] Political theology, then, is after a robust rather than a reductionist account of religion—regardless of whether it is done from a confessional or a non-confessional angle. "The best work in political theology has an impulse to use the conjunction of the two, the political and the theological, to explore the difficulties involved in each."[24] When it comes to populism, then, political theology can follow its impulse by interrogating both what is going on in the field and the categories used to understand what is going on in the field. While Weber's category of spirit is instructive because it brackets the issue of legitimate or illegitimate ownership of religion, political theology can complicate his separation of normative politics from neutral studies of normative politics.

Altogether, then, the contributions to this compilation constitute, in a way, a Weberian wager. They are aiming to analyze and to assess the spirit of populism. If the Weberian wager works—if there is indeed something like a 'spirit of populism'—scholars of populism will have to look at the metaphors and the methods with which they organize their studies in order to open up the conversation about normativity.

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19 Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 156.

20 For the discussion, see Kjell Engelbrekt, "What Carl Schmitt Picked Up in Max Weber's Seminar: A Historical Controversy Revisited," *The European Legacy* 14, no. 6 (2009): 667–684.

21 Normativity is often taken to distinguish theology from religious studies. Thomas A. Lewis, "On the role of normativity in religious studies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 168–185, argues that this distinction is dubious. The question is not *whether* norms but *which* norms are invoked by scholars of religion.

22 Vincent Lloyd, "Introduction," in *Race and Political Theology*, ed. Vincent Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 1–20.

23 Lloyd, "Introduction," 4.

24 Lloyd, "Introduction," 6.

2 Meaning

"There is a common frame," Brian Klug contends, "through which all hard-core populists view the world."[25] Brought into focus, the frame clarifies that populism claims control over 'the people.' The concept of populism comes from *populus*, 'the people.' As Thomas Frank argues in *The People, No*, the concept was coined in the nineteenth century as a designation for the proponents of the People's Party in the United States, whose economic, social, and cultural reform program he portrays as a predecessor of the Civil Rights Movement.[26] There is a political theology in the distinction between people and non-people that marks and maintains the spirit of populism. This theology confronts scholars of populism with the issue of normativity.

Rogers Brubaker criticizes normative conceptualizations of populism where the populist claim to 'the people' comes into view as either by definition democratic or by definition anti-democratic.[27] He points to two political theorists: Jan-Werner Müller and Chantal Mouffe. For Müller, the appeal to the people is problematic because it is directed against the other.[28] He is concerned with right-wing populism. For Mouffe, the appeal to the people is promising because it is directed against the oligarchy.[29] She is concerned with left-wing populism. By contrast, Brubaker points to the ambiguity of 'the people' as it is played out in populist politics. Drawing on Pierre-André Taguieff,[30] Brubaker discusses the left-wing and the right-wing definition of the people.[31] If 'the people' is taken to mean 'demos'—a political category—the delineation of the people from the non-people pits the people against spurned elites. This marks what Brubaker calls the "vertical opposition" at the core of Mouffe's

25 Brian Klug, "Populismus," in *SprachGewalt: Missbrauchte Wörter und andere politische Kampfbegriffe*, ed. David Ranan (Bonn: Dietz, 2021), 31–41, at 35.

26 Thomas Frank, *The People, No. A Brief History of Anti-Populism* (New York: Metropolitan, 2020), 19–52.

27 Rogers Brubaker, "Why Populism?," *Theory & Society* 46, no. 5 (2017): 357–385. In the analysis of Brubaker's account of populism, I draw on my discussion in Ulrich Schmiedel, "The Cracks in the Category of Christianism: A Methodological Plea for Ambiguity in the Conceptualization of Christianity," in *Contemporary Christian-Cultural Values: Migration Encounters in the Nordic Region,* ed. Cecila Nahnfeldt and Kaia Rønsdal (London: Routledge, 2021), 164–182.

28 See Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (London: Penguin, 2017).

29 See Chantal Mouffe, *For A Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018).

30 Pierre-André Taguieff, "Political science confronts populism: From a conceptual mirage to a real problem," *Telos* 20, no. 103 (1995): 9–43.

31 Brubaker, "Why Populism?," 362–363.

populism.[32] If 'the people' is taken to mean 'ethnos'—a cultural category—the delineation of the people from the non-people pits the people against spurned ethnicities. This marks what Brubaker calls the "horizontal opposition" at the core of Müller's account.[33] Brubaker also points to the people as 'the plebs.' It is the understanding that Frank underscores when he refers to the populism of the People's Party as "*our* radical tradition, a homegrown Left."[34] Yet the protests of PEGIDA are also a case in point. The 'people' in their slogan 'We are the People' purports to be about taking back control from the elites who are characterized as out of touch with the world,[35] but subcutaneously it presents the people as 'ethnos' rather than 'demos,' confined in racialized and religious categories. Of course, Mouffe and Müller are aware of the normativity in their accounts of populism, but Brubaker argues that the category of 'the people' is too slippery and too slick to make any normative assumptions. Can Brubaker circumvent normativity?

The definition of the people in the spirit of populism is reminiscent of Schmitt. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt defined the political through the decision about who should or should not be considered 'the enemy.'[36] According to Schmitt, this distinction is the "criterion" that allows for the definition of something as political (when it is concerned with enmity) or apolitical (when it is not concerned with enmity).[37] One of Schmitt's examples—"the thousand-year struggle" in which Christians have fought Muslims and Muslims have fought Christians—is particularly pertinent for the study of religion in populism.[38] For Schmitt, the example illustrates that Christianity can push the distinction between people and non-people to "the real possibility of physical killing" even if it commands Christians to love their enemies.[39] Where Christians are capable of killing Muslims (and Muslims are capable of killing Christians) because of their religion, religion *is* political.

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32 Brubaker, "Why Populism?," 363.

33 Brubaker, "Why Populism?," 363.

34 Frank, *The People, No*, 33.

35 In Germany, the slogan is associated with the Peaceful Revolution of 1989/1990 which brought down the Berlin Wall that separated the two German states. PEGIDA plays with this citation, portraying its protest as a democratic critique of totalitarianism in which the oppressed people revolt against the oppressive politicians.

36 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 26.

37 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 26.

38 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 29.

39 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 33. For Schmitt's account of the commandment of love, see *The Concept of the Political*, 29–30.

The decision about the enemy defines the people for Schmitt. "For as long as a people exists in the political sphere, this people must, even if only in the most extreme case—and whether this point has been reached has to be decided by it—determine by itself the distinction… Therein resides the essence of its political existence."[40] The decision about the enemy is a decision about the people and the non-people through which 'the people' are produced in the first place. While I doubt that Bachmann read Schmitt, his speeches have a Schmittian sound. For Bachmann, all Muslims have the duty to kill "the *kafir*, the unbeliever, who is: you."[41] Islam is a religion which has, according to him, invaded Europe with its "army of Muslims."[42] As he underscores in one speech (with applause from the audience), "we will rather perish uprightly than … bow to Islamization."[43]

Schmitt anchors the concept of sovereignty in the decision about the exceptional case. "Sovereign," he argues in *Political Theology*, "is he who decides about the exception."[44] According to Schmitt, theology survives secularization through sovereignty. "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state," Schmitt announces, "are secularized theological concepts."[45] The sacred and the sovereign are structurally identical. Although Schmitt's announcement is more often referenced than read, it suggests that the definition of 'the people' requires a decision similar to the creation out of nothing. 'The people' are conjured up—not out of thin, but out of theological air. While Schmitt echoes Weber (whom he considered a political theologian[46]), he is interested in the theology that remains after secularization. What Klug defines as the frame through which populists view the world might signal such a theological remainder—even if it is not pushed to the possibility of physical killing. There is a Schmittian political theology in the spirit of populism.

The constitution of the people through the decision of the sovereign is central to Schmitt's critique of liberalism. Liberals, Schmitt argues, aim to avoid the decision about the enemy by transferring it into economics (where the enemy is tied up in competition) or ethics (where the enemy is tied up

40 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 49 (translation altered).
41 Bachmann in a speech from August 1, 2016.
42 Bachmann in a speech from August 1, 2016.
43 Bachmann in a speech from June 5, 2017.
44 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5.
45 Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.
46 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology*, trans. Michael Hölzl and G. Ward (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 73.

in conversation).[47] Through this transfer, liberalism corrupts and corrodes the political, while secretly grabbing for the appeal that comes with claiming a position beyond enmity. In order to define the people, however, liberalism would have to distinguish between the liberal who is and the illiberal who is not allowed to contribute to ethics and economics—which is to say: liberalism would have to decide about the enemy.[48] For Schmitt, defending liberalism means dissolving liberalism. To put it in the terms of Patton's liberal paradox: if tolerance is taken as a criterion to decide who can and who cannot represent 'the people,' tolerance is a political criterion in Schmitt's sense. As such, tolerance has to distinguish between the tolerant and the intolerant which requires it to be intolerant itself. As mentioned above, versions of this paradox are played out in practical politics when politicians wonder about how to deal with the populists who have entered parliaments. In reaction to PEGIDA, both inclusion and exclusion of the populists has been tried—neither with much success.

In terms of political theory, it is crucial that Schmitt's critique runs through both Mouffe's and Müller's account of populism.[49] Mouffe distinguishes between antagonism and agonism in order to make Schmitt "compatible with the recognition of pluralism."[50] According to Mouffe, Schmittian antagonism calls for the opponent do be destroyed, while post-Schmittian agonism calls for the opponent to be debated. The opponent, for Mouffe, ought to be engaged with words rather than weapons.[51] Mouffe argues that populism enables a politics where the oppressed can come together against the oppressors. In claiming or re-claiming 'the people,' they have the chance to change both the debate and the terms of the debate by countering the consensus-driven politics of the centrists that reduces politics in liberal democracies to technocratic administration.[52]

Müller is more critical and more concerned about Schmitt's concentration on conflict. In response to Mouffe, he criticizes the call to capture politics in the "construction of the people."[53] He argues: "A Europe in which right-wing and

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47 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 28. See John P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 207–208.

48 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* 69–79.

49 For their respective accounts of Schmitt, see Müller, *A Dangerous Mind* and *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1999).

50 Mouffe, *For A Left Populism*, 91.

51 Mouffe, *For A Left Populism*, 91–92.

52 Mouffe, *For A Left Populism*, 19–24 and 79–86.

53 Müller, *What is Populism?*, 98–99

left-wing populists face each other with their respective concept of 'the people' … is a horror scenario. What we need instead is a sober—which is to say: not moralistically charged—engagement about fundamental political direction."[54] Klug agrees, arguing that any claim to represent the people *completely* rescinds democracy, unless the claim is itself characterized by pluralism.[55] The people are plural rather than singular. For Mouffe, however, the plurality requires the construction of a political body—'the people' in the plural—that turns the oppressed against the oppressors.

Altogether, then, Mouffe's constructive account of populism is grounded in a more positive account of Schmitt's critique of liberalism and Müller's critical account of populism is grounded in a more negative account of Schmitt's critique of liberalism. Both of them tackle the Schmittian political theology in the spirit of populism indirectly rather than directly. In contrast to Mouffe and Müller, Brubaker claims to be 'value-free' like Weber. He conceptualizes populism as a "repertoire."[56] The repertoire can be activated for a variety of political purposes, including democratic politics (as in Mouffe's account) or anti-democratic politics (as in Müller's account). According to Brubaker, his category of populism captures a global phenomenon—politics for 'the people'—from a neutral rather than a normative angle.[57] But the political theology in populism comes back to haunt him.

3 Metaphor

Through the metaphor of the hijacked faith, political theology returns into the study of populism. The distinction between the legitimate and the illegitimate owners of religion refocuses the frame through which populists view the world, particularly in the case of the far right.[58] The metaphor camouflages the political theology in the spirit of populism, thus closing the conversation about normativity before it can begin.

In their 'Introduction' to *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, Nadia Marzouki and Duncan McDonnell sketch the significance of religion for populism. At least since the 1990s, populist politicians and populist protesters

54 Müller, *Was ist Populismus?* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2016), 123. The scenario that Müller sketches here is missing in the English edition of his essay.

55 Klug, "Populism," 40.

56 Brubaker, "Why Populism?," 362.

57 Brubaker, "Why Populism?," 362.

58 See Hannah Strømmen and Ulrich Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity: Responding to the Far Right* (London: SCM, 2020).

have drawn on religion to define 'the people.'[59] PEGIDA is no exception. Religion is a marker to distinguish Christian people from non-Christian non-people in order to counter the 'Islamization' of Europe in the clash of civilizations. Marzouki and McDonnell argue that these references to religion reduce religion to belonging rather than believing. Populism is not about faith in God.[60] Their contrast between belonging and believing has generated perceptive analyses and piercing assessments of populism.[61]

Olivier Roy's concluding chapter to *Saving the People* pushes Marzouki's and McDonnell's analysis further. Roy argues that reductionist references to belonging rather than believing are a '"hijacking" of religion'.[62] Roy's argument assumes a distinction between the legitimate and the illegitimate owners of religion. The assumption comes to the fore when he wonders whether the populists will be able to "impose their vision of religion on the 'legitimate owners'" whom he identifies, seemingly with some hesitation, with "the Catholic Church".[63] Traditionally, the Catholic Church has identified itself with Christianity. In *Dominus Iesus*, a Declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that its then Prefect, Joseph Ratzinger, approved in 2000, the Catholic Church concluded that Catholicism represents church, while Protestantism represents church-like communities, "not Churches in the proper sense."[64] There is one church and one church only—the Catholic Church. Although the Declaration does not go so far as to suggest that Protestantism has hijacked Christianity, it is clear that the Catholic Church's distinction between legitimate and illegitimate ownership is contested. It could even constitute what Patton calls an "eruptive public space" in which not only the theological issues at stake but also the rules for debating the theological issues at stake are called

59 Nadia Marzouki and Duncan McDonnell, "Populism and Religion," in *Saving the People*, 1–12.

60 Marzouki and McDonnell, "Populism and Religion," 2.

61 The contrast between believing and belonging was coined by Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

62 Olivier Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," in *Saving the People*, 185–201, at 190. Roy adds that the Catholic Church "in contrast to the Protestant churches, which are usually divided along national lines and unable or unwilling to speak in the name of 'Christianity', is eager not to have the 'voice of the Church' … manipulated by lay movements, even when they claim to be Christian. This issue is important because only the Church can effectively dismiss the populist reference to (and use of) Christianity."

63 Roy, "Beyond Populism," 190.

64 The English translation of the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* is available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html (accessed May 15, 2020).

into question.[65] When Roy distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate owners of religion, he is not concerned with the quibbles between Catholicism or Protestantism. While I assume that he is not endorsing the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's evaluation of legitimate and illegitimate ownership, his distinction between honest and hijacked faith rests on a *theological* assumption that is not neutral but normative. Political theology, then, haunts Roy's study of populism.

Political theology is also at stake in Brubaker's account. While Brubaker argues against normativity in the conceptualization of populism, the normative distinction between legitimate and illegitimate ownership sneaks in when he contrasts Christianity with Christianism.[66] Although neither Christianity nor Christianism are defined, Brubaker's definition can be reconstructed from the distinctions that he draws between them. "Christianism" captures "secularized"[67] references to the Christian faith that see Christianity as a "culture" or a "civilization" (rather than a religion),[68] by emphasizing "belonging rather than believing" in an "identitarian" way.[69] There is no "practice of worship" since Christianity is not an end in itself, but a means to an end.[70] By contrast, "Christianity" captures non-secularized references to the Christian faith that see Christianity as a religion (rather than a culture or a civilization), by emphasizing believing rather than belonging in a non-identitarian way.[71] There is practice of worship since Christianity is not a means to an end, but an end in itself. Christianism is non-doctrinal, non-organizational, and without ritual, while Christianity is doctrinal, organizational, and with ritual.[72] According to Brubaker, the contrast between Christianity and Christianism explains the return of religion into European politics. The return is not a critique but a confirmation of the secularization of Europe, because the claims to the Christian faith in populist politics are style-over-substance. As Brubaker argues, the erosion of Christianity entails the emergence of Christianism.

If Roy's and Brubaker's accounts are representative of scholarship on the role of religion in populism, then the theological distinction between legitimate and illegitimate ownership runs through the field, even if the metaphor of the hijacked faith is not mentioned. It is also apparent in Frank's account

65 Patton, *Who Owns Religion?*, 64–66.
66 Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism," 1191–1226.
67 Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism," 1199.
68 Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism," 1199.
69 Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism," 1199.
70 Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism," 1199.
71 Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism," 1199.
72 Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism," 1199.

of the "genuine populism" of the People's Party which implies that populism can be either inauthentic (which means, for him, anti-democratic and right-wing) or authentic (which means, for him, democratic and left-wing).[73] The field, then, operates with what Elizabeth Shakman Hurd has presented as "the two faces of faith" paradigm, "a discourse that shapes the contemporary global governance of religious diversity."[74] According to this paradigm, there is the sectarian religion prone to conflict, on the one hand, and there is the non-sectarian religion prone to consensus, on the other hand. Hurd argues that the paradigm "enacts a … political logic that produces its own object ('religion') … It treats religion as a self-evident category that exists prior to the social fields in which it is enfolded, making it possible for something called 'religion' to be represented as motivating a host of actions."[75] While Hurd argues that the two faces of faith paradigm "produces" its object of study,[76] I would suggest that studies of populism, albeit working with the paradigm, are not producing but prioritizing extreme cases at opposite ends of the spectrum.[77] Hence, even if the definition of populism that runs through the field is neutral, the definition of religion is not.

Mattias Martinson points to the "'theology' of Christian monumentality" that mobilizes the claim to Christianity in populist politics.[78] In order to draw the distinction between people and non-people, populists reduce and reify religion into a monument, perhaps even a museum or a mausoleum.[79] Schmitt's emphasis on enmity has been criticized for a similar reductionism, where it is used to homogenize who can and who cannot be considered 'the enemy.' Martinson proposes that the theology of the populists has political power because it creates such a reductionist contrast. Once Christianity is monumentalized, the populists can weaponize their concept of Christianity. Hence, when churches advocate for conversations with Islam, they can be criticized for a sell-out of Christian identity, charged with desecrating and destroying the monument. With reference to the Bible, Bachmann came up with such a critique, claiming

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73 Frank, *The People, No*, 35. See also 223–244, 245–256.

74 Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 22.

75 Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*, 29.

76 Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*, 28.

77 See Schmiedel, "The Cracks in the Category of Christianism."

78 Mattias Martinson, "Towards a 'Theology' of Christian Monumentality: Post-Secular Reflections on Grace and Nature," in *Monument and Memory*, ed. Jonna Bornemark, Mattias Martinson, Jayne Svenungsson (Berlin: LIT, 2015), 21–42.

79 Mattias Martinson, *Sekularism, populism, xenofobi: En essä om religionsdebatten* (Malmö: Eskaton, 2017), 55.

that in contrast to the "fat princes of the church who … have sold their faith … for … a few pieces of silver," PEGIDA protects Christianity.[80] Populism, then, is the legitimate rather than the illegitimate owner of Christianity here.

The concept of populism that Brubaker proposed can clarify what is going on in cases like this one. Although 'the people' is 'the people of God,' it is still defined in a vertical and a horizontal opposition: the people of God have to be defended against the threat of Islam, aided and abetted by the elites inside and outside the churches. In the opposition between Christians who defend dialogue with Islam and Christians who despise dialogue with Islam—both with reference to Christianity!—the ambiguity of Bachmann's metaphor of a sold-out faith plays out its political power. It functions like the metaphor of the hijacked faith that organizes the study of religion in populism. Have the pro-dialogue churches hijacked Christianity from the anti-dialogue populists or have the anti-dialogue populists hijacked Christianity from the pro-dialogue churches? Or to return to Brubaker's contrast: is Christianism actually honest Christianity (as the populists would argue) or is Christianism actually hijacked Christianity (as the critics of the populists would argue)? Who owns religion?

Unless the scholar of populism is content with following theological tracts like the Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, she has to engage in political theology. Although he claims not to engage theology, Brubaker can help here. In critical conversation with Benjamin de Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis,[81] he criticizes normative conceptualizations of populism for covering up what he calls the "productive polysemy of 'the people.'"[82] He returns to the concepts of democratic populism defined by Mouffe and anti-democratic populism defined by Müller. Mouffe sees the people of populism mainly in a vertical opposition: as demos. Müller sees the people of populism mainly in a horizontal opposition: as ethnos. In order to either confirm populism (as in Mouffe) or criticize populism (as in Müller), the "ambiguity of appeals to 'the people'" is avoided.[83] By contrast, Brubaker calls for the acknowledgment of the ambiguity of the people in order to "underscore its pragmatic power and productivity."[84] Brubaker's call could and should be applied to any appeal to religion. Just like the metaphor of the hijacked faith, Brubaker's own contrast

80 Bachmann in a speech from August 1, 2016.

81 See Benjamin de Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis, "Distinctions and articulations: a discourse theoretical framework for the study of populism and nationalism," *Javnost: The Public* 24, no. 4 (2017): 301–319.

82 Rogers Brubaker, "Populism and Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalisms* 26, no. 1 (2020): 44–66, at 49.

83 Brubaker, "Populism and Nationalism," 53.

84 Brubaker, "Populism and Nationalism," 53.

between Christianism and Christianity covers up the ambiguity of these appeals, camouflaging their power and productivity in all too nice and neat a conceptualization. When 'Christianism' captures the hijacked religion, while 'Christianity' captures the honest religion, then the ambiguity of Christianity is taken out of the conceptualization of Christianity. It is—to use Brubaker's own terms—externalized rather than internalized.[85]

In *Islam: An American Religion*, Marzouki points out that references to religion such as "the Christian" or "the Judeo-Christian" fulfill a "performative function" for the construction of the people in populist politics.[86] She proposes that such a reference "does *not necessarily* imply any strong or sincere commitment to practicing a religion," which opens up the possibility to study them without immediately deciding about their (il)legitimacy.[87] Instead of avoiding normativity by papering over it, such studies open a space for conversations about political theology. Acknowledging the ambiguity of any appeal to religion prohibits an account of religion that simply reproduces a claim to legitimate or illegitimate ownership. Where what Orsi calls "the mother of all religious dichotomies"—the distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy—is not secretly smuggled from religious into non-religious categories,[88] political theology can be engaged critically and creatively.

Altogether, Brubaker's conclusion can be transposed from populism to Christianism. The distinction between the legitimate and the illegitimate owners of religion—the honest and the hijacked faith—reinforces the frame through which populists view the world. In order to challenge the frame, ambiguity needs to be internal rather than external to the categories with which scholars investigate and interpret appeals to religion. But accepting ambiguity means entering rather than exiting the liberal paradox.

4 Madness

So far, I have sketched the nexus between method and metaphor in the study of populism. Metaphors matter. If the scholar of populism captures the claims to Christianity in populist politics with the metaphor of the hijacked faith, she

85 Brubaker, "Populism and Nationalism," 61.

86 Nadia Marzouki, *Islam: An American Religion*, trans. C. Jon Delogu (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 152.

87 Marzouki, *Islam,* 152 (my emphasis).

88 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 183. Orsi is concerned with the moralization of the dichotomy between believers and unbelievers in the study of religion.

creates two stable Christianities: here is the one for those who defend dialogue with Islam ('honest Christianity' for them, but 'hijacked Christianity' for their critics) and there is the one for those who despise dialogue with Islam ('honest Christianity' for them, but 'hijacked Christianity' for their critics). With Bush, the scholar can write: 'Christianity is a vibrant faith. Millions of our fellow citizens are Christian. We respect the faith. We honor its traditions. Our enemy does not. Our enemy doesn't follow the great traditions of Christianity. They've hijacked a great religion.' If seen through the metaphor of the hijacked faith, both the populist appeal to religion and the study of the populist appeal to religion navigate the liberal paradox by distinguishing between its legitimate and its illegitimate owners. The metaphor gets them out of the liberal paradox by producing a strong and stable distinction to control the category of religion: tolerant religion is honest and intolerant religion is hijacked. Religion is on or off course, like the planes that were crashed into the World Trade Center. The metaphor of the hijacked faith, then, is normatively charged, even if its normativity is not acknowledged. But what if the liberal paradox is a promising point of departure to study the spirit of populism?

The contributions to this compilation straddle the whole spectrum of political theology, from descriptive as well as prescriptive angles.[89] Inspired by Weber, the spirit of populism is conceptualized as expansively and as elastically as possible in order to explore the sometimes hidden and sometimes not so hidden significance of political theology for populism. Whether one agrees or disagrees with him, Weber's student Schmitt emphasized that theology survives secularization. The studies that follow scrutinize the significance of theology for populist politics. Given the cross-disciplinary and cross-denominational approach taken in this compilation, neither a unifying concept of political theology nor a unifying concept of populism has been imposed on the contributions. Rather, the contributors were asked to clarify the concepts they are using to understand the specter and the spirit of populism. As a consequence, four thematic threads emerged: 'Resources,' 'Readings,' 'Reflections,' and 'Responses.'

4.1 *Resources*

Vincent Lloyd opens the section on the resources of populism by characterizing anger as a secularized theological concept. Suggesting that populism is often seen as "angry people doing politics," Lloyd investigates the ambiguous impact that anger can have in the public square. Lauryn Hill's song "Black Rage" is

89 For the spectrum, see Lloyd, "Introduction," 1–20.

taken as a case of anger that pushes beyond the structures and systems taken for granted in politics, an anger that animates movements such as Black Lives Matter. Theologically, Lloyd argues, anger is connected to claims to sovereignty—a connection that comes to the fore in populist politics. Whatever else it is, it is a category that calls for theopolitical discernment.

Thomas Lynch takes up this call. Both Lloyd and Lynch use Schmitt's political theology as a theoretical tool to analyze claims to sovereignty. Lynch turns from the emotional to the epistemic resources of populism. Probing its connections to conspiracism, such as 'QAnon,' Lynch points to epistemic practices that create a simplified and shallow binary worldview. However, he finds such a worldview both among populists and among the critics of populists. As a consequence, he argues that populism should not be criticized because it is populist. The issue at stake is not stylistic, but substantial—namely racism. It is racism that needs to be opposed in both its populist and its non-populist forms.

Historically, the category of the people has connected populism to the political imaginary of the nation. *Mariëtta van der Tol* traces this imaginary to its "theopolitical predecessor," the *Corpus Christianum*. The bond between believing and belonging continues to put pressure on the conceptual category of the nation. Presenting the debate between the Dutch Reformed pastors Abraham Kuyper and Philippus Hoedemaker, van der Tol calls for a new theological account of culture in order to articulate or re-articulate the category of the nation under the conditions of pluralism.

In the chapter, "America Transcendent," *Elizabeth Shakman Hurd* points out that any such re-articulation of the nation has to confront the complexities of the category of religion, characterized, as it is, by Christianity. She explores the resources for political theologies of American exceptionalism in a number of settings in the contemporary United States. She discovers interpretations of America as transcendent, infused with a religious or quasi-religious aura that is usually neither acknowledged nor analyzed. These interpretations, Hurd argues, resonate through American populism today.

4.2 *Readings*

Practices of reading or non-reading are a central resource of populism. *Hannah Strømmen* examines how far-right populists in Europe understand and use sacred scriptures in order to construct a clash of civilizations, characterized by what she calls "scripture-cultures." Strømmen offers a striking proposal for "political scripture research" that can map conceptually and comparatively how perceptions of sacred scriptures have become embedded in politics. Her core concern is to interpret scripture as lived, thus teasing out why and which

perceptions gain traction. Politically, research into "lived scripture" has a normative edge because it shows the constructed and contingent nature of any scriptural claim.

Fatima Tofighi applies Strømmen's proposal to the study of Islam. Whereas both the defenders and the despisers of populism seem to suggest that Islam requires new liberal(ized) reading practices in order to overcome the violence associated with the Qur'an, Tofighi points out that the relationship between hermeneutics and politics is not as straightforward as this requirement suggests. Through an overview of pre-modern and modern receptions of Q 4:34, she shows how a passage that seems to call for violence against women has provoked interpreters to circumvent the literal meaning of the text—regardless of the liberal or illiberal political proclivities of the interpreters. Qur'anic hermeneutics is a dynamic process that can neither be curtailed nor controlled. It complicates the construct of the clash of civilizations.

Brian Klug probes this dynamic process of hermeneutics in his critique of the role played by scriptural and liturgical tropes in political Zionism. He points to the peculiar form these tropes take in the controversies stirred up by Donald J. Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Klug takes Psalm 137 as his cue in order to ask what it means, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, *not* to forget Jerusalem. Against the "flattening" of scriptural and liturgical texts, he presents Judaism as an antidote to the populism associated with political Zionism.

While he does not focus on uses and understandings of scripture, *Mattias Martinson* takes up the proposal for political scripture research in order to think through the role of the theologian in the context of populism. Defining populism as an elitist anti-elitism, Martinson discusses two cases of populist appeals to religion, the direct appeal to Christian Europe in Hungary and the indirect appeal to Christian Europe in Sweden. He argues that these appeals are post-Christian phenomena, calling for a post-Christian theological strategy. Theology needs to develop into an open and open-ended discourse, drawing on the variety of religious and non-religious legacies shaping Europe today. As a Christian theologian, he concludes that "the most urgent task today is to … to integrate Islamic theology into the very core of our discipline."

4.3 *Reflections*

Concentrating on populism in the Balkans, *Zoran Grozdanov* opens the reflections on concrete cases of populism in a variety of contexts. He investigates the theological support for the claim that 'We are the people,' which echoed throughout Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. He identifies the Incarnation in the theology of Pope John Paul II as a doctrine with ambiguous

political consequences. Although the Pope called Christians to cross the boundaries of national communities, his theology can be taken up as a tool to legitimize the 'othering' of the communities and the identities, LGBTQ+ for instance, targeted by populist movements in the Balkans. Such targeting of communities and identities is also a core characteristic of populism in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Ludger Viefhues-Bailey argues that populist movements in the United States point to the fact that democracies need to discipline sexual passions in order to place sovereignty into 'the people.' In conversation with Chantal Mouffe's account of populism, he shows how conservative Christianities that are characterized by "hetero-patriarchy" construct and cash in on the need for what he calls "passionate politics," both *ad intram* and *ad extram*. Viefhues-Bailey thus demonstrates how the concrete and the conceptual hang together. Conceptualizations of populism cannot ignore the concrete contexts in which populist politics is performed.

Following up on Viefhues-Bailey, *Esther McIntosh* argues that what was missing from the pre- and post-2016 election coverage on both sides of the Atlantic was feminist analysis of the patriarchal nature of populist politics. McIntosh considers the gendered implications of Christian theology, including the references to race and religion, in the populist politics of Christian leaders. The differential impact of the global pandemic on diverse populations, she argues, is evidence for the differences that constructs of race and religion can make. McIntosh calls for a theological response to populism that re-thinks liberation theology's preferential option for the poor in light of these constructions, even if such a response might seem populist itself.

Lukas David Meyer concentrates on one of the issues that McIntosh captured: the theological tropes underpinning Brexit. Like McIntosh, Meyer argues that the main arguments for Brexit were populist, blurring the boundaries between political left and political right. Among Christians, these arguments took a specific turn. Concentrating on the debate in the Church of England, especially the interventions by Nigel Biggar and Giles Fraser, he characterizes "the God of the Brexiteers" as "a God who has elected the British people first." This election will either protect them or provoke them to do penance for their failings. In any case, there will be the restitution of a great British nation that will rule again. In response, Meyer calls for the consideration of 'Europe' as a theological category. Drawing on the three principles of the Conciliar Process, he develops theological criteria to assess European politics.

Doug Gay develops similar criteria. Pointing to the campaigns for Scottish independence, however, he argues that, just like nationalism, populism needs to be "discipled" rather than "demonized." The nationalism of Brexit that Meyer

probed—Gay points to the significance of Englishness here—differs from the nationalism espoused by the Scottish National Party. Accordingly, Gay advocates for a theologically-infused performance of political claim-making, both in terms of nationalism and in terms of populism. Thus, he argues, theology can open populism up to those who are deemed 'other,' either through religious or through racialized categories. The set of criteria that Gay conceptualizes is a political theological tool to respond to populism in the public square.

4.4 *Responses*

Jonathan Chaplin's chapter, "A Political Theology of 'The People,'" opens the responses to populism that draw on political theology normatively. In a way, these responses answer Lloyd's call for discernment. Chaplin conceptualizes 'the people' through the category of "the political community," which he uses to define a number of core concepts in Calvinist and Catholic political thought. The ensuing conceptual ensemble yields an understanding of 'the people' that can function as a criterion against which populist movements can be checked.

Julie E. Cooper takes sovereignty as a point of departure. She draws on the philosopher and publicist Jakob Klatzkin to criticize the turn to ethics in contemporary Jewish thought. Particularly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—fractured and fueled by populist politicians—Cooper argues that a concentration on ethics cannot create a "forceful rejoinder to claims, now resurgent, that sovereign power is a necessary condition for security, agency, and self-determination." Cooper makes a case for the power of the political imagination to envision agency beyond state sovereignty, for politics rather than ethics.

The following two chapters re-think the church as a theopolitical response to populism. Joseph Sverker points to the ambiguity of any appeal to Christianity in a Europe characterized by populists pedaling a clash of civilizations. He conceptualizes the dichotomy between 'honest Christianity' and 'hijacked Christianism' as a characteristic of the church. In a careful consideration of sociological studies harking back to Theodor W. Adorno, Sverker points out that the faith in Jesus Christ that is lived in the church can immunize against right-wing politics. This immunization works only, as Sverker argues in conversation with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's christology, if the church is like Christ—namely, there for 'the other,' those who are despised and discriminated against. Paradoxically, then, confessing Christ in "Christian Europe" might mean to call for the "death of the church."

Sturla J. Stålsett also calls for renewed reflection on the church. Taking his cue from Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self, Stålsett argues for a self-understanding of the church that presupposes the presence of the other. He

probes the political consequences of this self-understanding by presenting the liberation theology of Jon Sobrino as an antidote to populism. While he acknowledges that the internal and external critiques of liberation theology present this theology as a populism predicated upon a specific people—the poor—he argues that ecclesiology allows for a discernment of inclusive and exclusive populisms. The church is only church if it is there for others.

In the chapter, "The Orthodox 'Unorthodox,'" *Ryszard Bobrowicz and Johanna Gustafsson Lundberg* take up Patton's liberal paradox by pointing to the divisionist thinking that runs through populism and critiques of populism. With a focus on Sweden, they discuss the public debate about Netflix's 'Unorthodox.' This debate shows that such divisionist thinking can be found in more sophisticated and subtler forms, particularly with regard to the division between 'the sacred' and 'the secular.' It is this division, they argue, that needs to be overcome through a radical pluralism, allowing for an identification of people not by "what" they are, but by "who" they are. Theologically, this shift requires a careful and chastened concept of universalism, the theological roots of which they find in the classic tradition and contemporary trajectory of Scandinavian creation theology.

Pluralism is also at stake in *Joshua Ralston*'s conclusion to this compilation. Ralston points to the potential of comparative theology for the study of the claims to religion in populist politics. Concentrating on the political thought of Sayyid Qutb, Ralston invites scholars, particularly Christian theologians, to engage with Islamic thought and theology in order to formulate political proposals for a pluralist public square, fraught with racialized and religious polarizations. Ralston's invitation includes a provincialization of the European and American contexts covered in this compilation: populism has to be studied globally, from critical, comparative, and coalitional angles.

My short survey of the contributions to this compilation stresses that scholars of religion cannot get out of the liberal paradox. As Patton affirms in *Who Owns Religion?*, the fact that scholars are caught in a paradox implies neither that they should confirm nor that they should criticize the claims to religion stoked in the public square.[90] Either is possible. Yet scholars need to be "grounded in a thoughtful understanding of what their own theories of participation in the public sphere .... ought to look like."[91] The need for such grounding brings me back to where I began.

Many scholars of religion will be uneasy with some sort of theological turn that engages them in normative conversations about the interpretation of the

90 Patton, *Who Owns Religion?*, 248.
91 Patton, *Who Owns Religion?*, 248.

traditions and the trajectories of religion.[92] Weber would be the first to protest. Some of the contributors to this compilation might join him. However, as Schmitt clarifies, scholarship that is caught in the liberal paradox cannot escape such conversations. It might be more promising and more pertinent, then, to confront them head-on. Orsi suggests that after 9/11 people ask for assurance about religion. But in order to offer such assurance, the confrontation with the paradox needs to be acknowledged rather than abandoned. "Following the dictum 'If you can't fix it, feature it'," Patton proposes to "place controversy … at the center of our field."[93] She characterizes "religion as controversy—by definition filled with breakages and betrayals."[94] It requires a bit of madness to work with blurred and broken concepts. But such concepts encapsulate a challenge and a chance for a political theology haunted by the spirit of populism, a political theology for polarized times.

92 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 197–198, is skeptical of a turn to theology, because the involvement in debates about the interpretation of the traditions and trajectories of a religion help little to understand the religion which is, for him, the goal of the study of religion.

93 Patton, *Who Owns Religion?*, 29.

94 Patton, *Who Owns Religion?*, 33.

PART 1

Resources

CHAPTER 2

Anger: A Secularized Theological Concept

Vincent Lloyd

What motivates the rise of populism in our current political moment? One answer that is often given by the media is anger. Indeed, populism and anger are so closely associated in popular discourse as to become almost one: populism is angry people doing politics. And today, many people are angry. From Trump to Brexit, from rivalries in the Middle East to nationalisms in Eastern Europe to protests in Hong Kong, from racial justice demonstrations in Ferguson to the global #metoo movement, anger now seems to be a prime mover of global politics. Viewed from the top, successful political elites stoke and direct anger so as to increase their power. Viewed from the bottom, ordinary people the world over are feeling angry about their circumstances and looking for means to collectively express that anger—and to change their circumstances.

What would it mean to treat anger by means of political theology? The interest in the concept and method of political theology in the twenty-first century has to do with the parallels between the tumult of our time and the tumult of Weimar Germany. Both periods are characterized by anxiety, rapidly changing social conditions, seemingly unpredictable social movements, and the possibility of violence. In a sense, turning to political theology promises to calm the anxieties that accompany such an age, first, by explaining how it came about and, second, by offering the promise of resolution. Carl Schmitt diagnoses a deficient conception of sovereignty as a problem, brought about by forgetting theology—or, by bad theology. He offers as a solution a new conception of sovereignty, properly aligned with Christian ideas about God's sovereignty. Schmitt's work explains why his contemporaries in Weimar Germany, on left and right, were angry, and it proposes a means of calming their anger (the existential enemy is encountered without feelings of hatred or anger, on Schmitt's account).[1] Might political theology similarly allow for a diagnosis of twenty-first century anxieties, and a prescription for their resolution? Might it explain why so many people seem to be angry today, and propose a way to calm that anger?

1 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

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In one sense, anger suggests the opposite of sovereignty. If sovereignty is about control and order, anger is about disruption and chaos. Social movements fueled by anger speak in the name of the people, or a group of people, as opposed to the powers that be. From the social movement's perspective, the state has been captured by forces that are at odds with the people, whether they are bureaucrats in Brussels or the forces of white supremacy or the forces of patriarchy. Conventional means of political action will not do; the captured state thwarts the possibility of such action. So stymied, the people react with anger, and that anger fuels social movements. Those movements challenge the sovereignty of the state; in some cases, they advance an alternative conception of sovereignty, the sovereignty of the people, which can only be realized by disrupting the conventional workings of politics.

If political theology is concerned with sovereignty, with explaining sovereignty's logic and with diagnosing its deficiencies by turning to the religious ideas that lurk behind it, then anger might seem to be only of secondary interest to political theology. At most, anger would suggest a mismatch between the political concept of sovereignty and its theological analogue. People committed to certain theological views of the sovereignty of God might be angered at what seems to be the deficiency or malformation of a political concept of sovereignty. Indeed, this was precisely the motivation of Schmitt's treatise on political theology: the sense of sovereignty undergirding parliamentary democracy, sovereignty resting in the people, mismatched the sense of sovereignty attributed to God, as singular and capable of suspending the laws of nature.

While the means by which Schmitt goes about making his diagnosis and prescription is an analysis of one political concept in particular, that of sovereignty, it may be the case that, in our world today, with changes in technology and media, with the growth of supra-national and sub-national entities, what we mean by sovereignty has been put under pressure. Given the complex, pluralistic religious landscape today, a reassertion of some concept of sovereignty drawn from a particular religious community's view of God would be unlikely to calm social anxieties; indeed, it would likely exacerbate them, or violently conceal those anxieties. (Of course, this was also the case in Weimar Germany: the assertion of singular sovereign authority only concealed social anxieties, and at an extremely heavy cost in human life.)

What, then, is the point of turning to political theology in an age of populism? As it is employed in the critical humanities, political theology names a tool for describing our world, a tool to peer beneath its misleading appearances. On this view, what is significant about political theology is its method, not its normative aspirations. It appears as if, today, in Europe and North America,

political concepts are secular, but actually there are religious ideas—and religious beliefs, practices, and emotions—lurking behind them. Sovereignty is just one example, the one that Schmitt happened to develop the most fully, but we should attend to Schmitt's much more ambitious claim, that each and every political concept has religion lurking behind it. If we want to understand political life—and rightly understanding political life is the prerequisite for effective political action—we must attend to that concealed religious background.

I would like to try an experiment. Instead of treating anger as secondary to sovereignty, as the product of a deficient account of sovereignty, what if we treat anger and sovereignty as two secularized theological concepts. Specifically, I will reflect on accounts of anger that circulate today and ask what religious ideas are entangled with them. First, I suggest that one group of accounts of anger rest on certain secularist assumptions about the world as well-ordered, religion as maintaining that order, and anger as responding to threats to that order. Second, I suggest that another approach to anger, taken particularly by theorists of gender and race, hints at the theological issues raised by anger. Finally, I gesture toward ways in which that theological background of anger might be probed, and ways in which it might allow for more effective political analysis in our populist present.

1 Theorizing Anger

One approach cultural critics have taken to making sense of the anger that seems to characterize our present times is to search for underlying configurations of society that result in anger. Pankaj Mishra diagnoses what he calls our current "age of anger" as a second coming of an earlier age of anger, one that accompanied the industrial revolution in Europe but that involves a structure he finds repeated throughout the world, across history.[2] In nineteenth-century Europe, rapid changes in the economy disrupted previously stable social structures and systems of making meaning in the world, including religion. The result was the flourishing of various movements that demonized harbingers of the new era, glorified an imagined past, and sought to bring about a future world different than that toward which history seemed to be traveling. In their purest form, Mishra argues, these impulses are entangled, and they precipitate violence. The anarchist assassins of the nineteenth century foreshadow the selfie-taking Islamic State militants of the twenty-first century, he argues,

2 Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Picador, 2017).

as rapid changes in the economy and technology today disrupt ways of life. Absolute enemies are invented ('the West'), an idealized past is imagined (the Caliphate), and violent means are used to bring about a future at odds with the narrative of 'progress' that seems inevitable (an Islamic State – or, an America that is made great again). The dynamic as a whole is motivated by anger: anger at the disruption of a way of life, and at the disruption of stories for making sense of a way of life. Without a narrative to explain disruption, feelings replace words: anger, and then imagination, and then, potentially, violence.

Writing a decade earlier, Arjun Appadurai's *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* offers a different, but not unrelated, diagnosis of what he sees as the proliferation of political movements fueled by anger.[3] While Mishra diagnoses the last decade or so as an "age of anger," for Appadurai, the 1990s are a decade of anger. The four decades after the Second World War, when the overarching political frame was that of the Cold War, featured political actors motivated by cool calculation. Whether they had a belief in the superiority of capitalism or communism, political actors maneuvered rationally to advance interests following from their core convictions. With the end of the Soviet Union, a new political framework took hold. Now, a logic of purity reigns, privileging the singular: the singular state and the singular individual. Rather than a conflict between forces of good and evil, communism and capitalism, the primary form of political conflict became that between a state and its minority populations, those who threatened the purity of the state, its singular essence. At the same time, the spread of mass media and advances in technology threaten the purity of the state and thus motivate projects of purification. But those same shifts in media and technology allow for minority communities ("small numbers") to connect with each other, within a state and in diasporas, making it all the more difficult for states to achieve their desire for purity. The result is snowballing tension between "vertebrate" systems, such as states, and "cellular" systems, such as minority groups—a tension which manifests as anger.[4] Such anger, on Appadurai's view, was responsible for the genocide in Rwanda, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the success of xenophobic parties in Europe.

While Mishra and Appadurai offer quite different accounts of the social configurations that motivate anger, what they share is an account of the human as a creature that desires order and flourishes once society is brought into order. That humans are not able fully to bring about this order results in frustration that manifests in anger, and often in violence. For Mishra, relatively

3 Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

4 Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*, 21.

well-ordered societies are inevitably disrupted, a byproduct of human economic and technological innovation. Such disruption calls into question the very possibility of order, fueling entwined flights of fancy and rage. Anger marks the limits of religion, as maintainer of order, and the danger of religion, as rebellion against order. For Appadurai, the Cold War binary offered one sense of order that could provide humans the comfort they desired; the post-Cold War quest for pure singularity offers another way of achieving that desire. But, inevitably, minority communities contaminate the purity of the nation. They are persecuted by means of religion, and they evade persecution, and strike back, by means of religion. In short, for both Mishra and Appadurai, the desire for order is fundamental, a transcendent given—something like a theological proposition. Organized religions of all stripes respond to this desire, and anger responds to this desire.

From a very different direction, with a focus on the micro rather than the macro level, and on the ethical rather than on the political, contemporary philosophers reflecting on anger also begin with a commitment to a well-ordered world, with anger marking deviations from this order. These philosophical accounts explain anger in one of two ways. First, and most basically, they argue that anger responds to a wrong. When something does not do what it is supposed to do, what it is right for it to do, anger is the appropriate response. As Amia Srinivasan summarizes this position, "one's anger that *p* is apt only if *p* constitutes a genuine moral violation."[5] This leaves much room for analyzing the aptness of anger. It may be that I misunderstand what a moral violation is. It may be that I am confused about whether a certain act fits the definition of a certain moral violation. It may be that I am confused about what a certain act is. Intimate relationships offer plenty of examples of these sorts of disagreements about the aptness of anger. One partner perceives a certain action—not taking out the rubbish, say—as an offense and is angered. The other partner counters that the action is misperceived: in fact, she was going to take out the rubbish later, after finishing the washing. Or, the other partner counters that it was not her responsibility, so it was no violation at all. Or, the other partner counters that there was some background condition that trumps the normal responsibility to take out the rubbish, for example, a sick child that required attention. These sorts of concerns determine whether anger was apt or not, and it may well be that anger that, from one angle, appears apt is clearly not apt when viewed from a different angle. At the root of it all, though, is a commitment to something like a moral code. The debate about the aptness of anger is possible because, underneath, there are practices that are moral and

5 Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2018): 123–144, at 129.

others that violate morality. Whereas in days of yore we might read a sacred text to determine what the content of that moral code is, now anger serves as a guide to that moral code. We can read off anger, as it were, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Just as for social theorists like Mishra and Appadurai anger points to order, for philosophers like Srinivasan anger points to order, now moral rather than social.

The second approach contemporary philosophers take to anger is to look for its sources in the violation of honor or dignity. As William Galston develops this account, before modernity, anger marked a violation of honor.[6] Honor was attached to office or rank; a certain action would provoke anger when directed at someone of high rank, say, royalty, but would not provoke anger when directed at someone of low rank, say, a merchant. In modernity, honor democratizes. Each has equal honor: this is our modern conception of dignity.[7] Now, anger marks violations of this dignity that we share. Put another way, anger is prompted by humiliation. We can see how, on this account, anger at the individual level and anger at the social level are linked. When a people is humiliated, that is, when each member of a group has his or her dignity violated, for example through colonialism, anger is the fitting response. Violating honor or dignity is wrong, and anger tracks such wrongs. Once again, a good deal of discernment may be necessary to see whether misperception was involved. Perhaps the soldier did not notice the officer passing and so failed to salute; perhaps what seemed like a humiliation was actually a necessary step in acquiring a certain skill—or was it really necessary?

When approaching anger in this way, we see how it, again, follows from a commitment to social order. Back when anger marked violations of honor, that social order which anger tracked and enforced was a social hierarchy. In modernity, that social order is flattened and moralized, transformed into the inviolable dignity of each autonomous human being. There is an extensive literature exploring the antinomies that result when dignity is individualized in this way, in cultures where dignity is not conceived of as the capacity for individual autonomy but, for example, where dignity is tied to relationship with land and place or where dignity is tied to modesty.[8] Probing these antinomies

6 William Galston, "Anger, Humiliation, and Political Theory: Bringing the Darker Passions Back In," in *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice*, ed. Matt Sleat (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 93–113.

7 See Jeremy Waldron, *Dignity, Rank, and Rights*, ed. Meir Dan-Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

8 For example, Dana Lloyd, "Paradoxes of Dignity in Israel/Palestine," *Law, Culture, and the Humanities* 14, no. 3 (2018): 391–401; Dana Lloyd, *Arguing for This Land: Rethinking Indigenous Sacred Sites* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, forthcoming).

and the alternative accounts of dignity to which they gesture simply reinforces the point that anger, when understood as tracking violations of dignity, is also tracking a commitment to social order, where the content of social order may look different in different contexts.

So far, I have suggested that much discussion of anger, from both cultural critics and philosophers, is decidedly secularist and understands anger in a way that is premised on a commitment to the primacy of social order. Why is this a problem? For Christian theologians, giving social order primacy, and giving it the last word, putting it in an effectively transcendental position, reduces God to worldly terms. Christianity becomes a product of or response to social order rather than a site from which to challenge social order, to bend it in a Christian direction. Put another way, human law gets the last word, not God's law. This, of course, is John Milbank's critique of secular sociology in *Theology and Social Theory*.[9] But it is not a set of concerns limited to Christian theologians. Any scholar of religion who resists reducing religion and morality to social forces ought to hesitate when presented with such accounts of anger. Secular critics of secularism, who aim their critical tools in the same direction as Milbank but for different reasons, motivated by a concern that secularism is an ideology entangled with colonialism, capitalism, racialization, or patriarchy, ought to resist such accounts of anger. Such secular critics, too, would find anger reductionism an ideological move, giving worldly systems of domination the last word. But setting aside all of these rather abstract theoretical reasons for approaching anger differently, let us reflect on whether this account of anger actually matches the anger that swirls around populism today.

2 Second-Order Anger

Most basically, in today's populist context, anger marks political forces that are not reducible to reason, and it marks them pejoratively.[10] Instead of leaving politics to experts who coolly calculate which policies will fulfill the interests of the most constituents, there is now a sense that such rational calculation goes badly wrong, actually running against the interests of many people, perhaps even most people. Or, put another way, politics as cool calculation violates certain people, doing violence to them or attacking their integrity or dignity.

9 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

10 For a discussion of various definitions of populism, see the introduction to this volume, Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors."

From the perspective of the rational political actor, those who are violated, or whose interests are ignored, are simply sore losers. Instead of acknowledging that, in politics, some days one wins and some days one loses, these sore losers develop negative feelings aimed at the rules of the game, at politicians and the political system. They grow angry.

Another factor that puts anger into circulation as a description for today's political dynamics has to do with grievance. Populist anger names a grievance, a wrong, but in particular a wrong that was concealed. Today, more than in earlier days, political rhetoric attacks culpable parties. Ordinary people have amorphous feelings of being wronged—lacking the money or respect they are due, say—and those feelings take the form of anger when a culpable party is named by a politician. Now someone is to blame for the frustrations of daily life, and action can be taken to address those frustrations, namely, supporting a particular politician or political platform. On this account, it is not necessarily that people today are more frustrated by aspects of the world or the political system but that politicians today have hit upon a certain rhetorical technique that creates a pathway from frustration to political anger. Of course, it may also be that frustrations have grown deeper, and it may be that the creation of pathways from frustration to political anger does not require an agent, a politician, but arises organically as frustration crosses certain thresholds of intensity and proximity.

A third reason we are motivated to speak of anger in connection with populism is that the language of anger circulates around movements we think of as populist. In other words, if we bracket what people are feeling, people's hearts, as it were, and listen to their words, we hear proclamations of anger. To take but one example, the Black Lives Matter movement, prompted and fueled by instances of police violence against Black Americans, might be described as involving frustration, or disillusionment, or self-assertion. And it certainly does involve all of these, but it also involves, on the surface, anger or rage.[11] In the wake of the Ferguson uprising, the singer Lauryn Hill composed a song entitled "Black Rage." She sings, "Black rage is founded on blatant denial / Squeezed economics, subsistence survival, / Deafening silence and social control. Black rage is founded on wounds in the soul!"[12] She goes on to describe other ills faced by Black Americans, such as poisoned water, police beatings, and psychic violence, but also the denial of those forms of violence, a "spiritual treason" that results in "self-hatred." In other words, here we have a combination of the

11 See Vincent Lloyd, "The Ambivalence of Black Rage," *Comparative Literature and Culture* 21, no. 3 (2019).

12 Hill posted the lyrics to "Black Rage (Sketch)", on her website https://mslaurynhill.com/post/95329923112/black-rage-sketch (accessed August 5, 2020).

two other ways in which anger and populism are entangled. We have a realization of the limits of rational politics (because political calculus was founded on misinformation) and the fact of grievance (police violence and other ills), tied together in an idiom arising organically from a protest movement. This idiom, "black rage," bubbled up in the writings of organic intellectuals of the movement including Brittney Cooper, Mychal Denzel Smith, and the Chicago-based Black Youth Project 100, all of whom penned essays explaining and defending "black rage." If we look at supporters of Brexit or Trump, the Standing Rock Sioux or the #metoo movement, we could point to similar instances where movement participants and leaders claim the language of anger and attach it to these twin motives: expressing grievance that moves beyond what had been the limits of political calculus.

Put simply, anger that circulates around populist movements is not adequately explained by referring back to a commitment to social order. While Lauryn Hill certainly sings of wrongs that Black Americans have endured as she explicates Black anger, violation of dignity or a moral code does not explain Black anger. Rather, it is the fact of the wrongs coupled with the fact that they have been inexpressible that motivates Black anger. But even this is not the whole story. Hill is not simply saying that the realm of representation—political or linguistic or aesthetic—was incomplete, preventing Blacks from naming wrongs committed against them, and now it is being made complete. If she were saying that, she would be committed to a conception of social order as bedrock. She would simply be describing a sophisticated version of anger as tracking a moral wrong, or rather two moral wrongs: the moral wrong of the underlying grievance and the moral wrong involved in the misperception of that underlying grievance. She would hold the belief that, if only we could all perceive rightly, we would properly understand all the moral norms and social order would be restored.

But this is not Hill's song. The bedrock of her lyrics is confusion, naming that confusion, naming the causes of that confusion. Her song is set to the music of "My Favorite Things" from *The Sound of Music*, and she sings, "So when the dog bites / And when the beatings / And I'm feeling mad / I simply remember all these kinds of things / And then I don't fear so bad." What are these things she remembers? Not a list of moral violations, but rather a list of systems of domination. Capitalism, slavery and its afterlives, political systems gone awry, and their effects: the distortion of reality, self-denial and self-hatred among those enduring domination, and psychic and bodily violence. Life under domination is a state of "purposed confusion," filled with "myth or illusion," but Hill offers no pointers to account for an alternative world without domination, of clarity and consistency and reasonableness.

And Hill makes this point in something like a theological idiom, or, more precisely, a negative theological idiom. She sings, "Try if you must but you can't have my soul / Black rage is made by ungodly control." Systems of domination make Black Americans into "human packages," fit only for "human trafficking." They are reduced to "victims of violence"—of "dog bites" in a quite different sense than those conjured by Julie Andrews in *A Sound of Music*. Even as bodies are captured and mutilated, the soul resists. The soul, here, is not the seat of self-governance. In fact, it is not clear what the soul is at all. It is conjured only in the negative, as that which remains after all else has been captured, even one's sense of self. The next line is powerfully suggestive, and powerfully equivocal: "Black rage is made by ungodly control." On one hand, Hill is naming systems of domination as ungodly, perhaps demonic. It is these demonic forces that capture the Black body but never the Black soul, and out of that soul comes anger. Note how there is no sense of reasonableness, or godliness, emanating from the Black soul to counteract the "ungodly control" striving to capture it from without. There is simply this dark double negativity, anger as that which is not ungodly. Or perhaps, read differently, Black rage is, indeed, controlled, but controlled by some force entirely inscrutable to the world—controlled by some "ungodly", not un-God-like, force. These two readings are, in the end, the same: Hill develops an account of anger as resistance to overwhelming systems of domination, where that resistance is illegible from the perspective of the world. Anger is no longer secular, worldly. Just the opposite: for Hill, anger marks the limits of the secular, the limits of the world.

Hill is not alone in presenting anger in this way. Indeed, she participates in a tradition of feminist theorists and theorists of color who push beyond accounts of anger that tether us to social order. bell hooks and Cornel West both write eloquently of black rage, seeing examples of it in figures ranging from Malcolm X to ordinary Black neighbors and friends, and in the theorists themselves.[13] Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed takes anger as an occasion to interrogate systems of domination. On her account, feminism "moves from anger into an interpretation of that which one is against, whereby associations or connections are made between the object of anger and broader patterns or structures."[14] Moreover, for Ahmed anger is not simply reactive, not reducible to social order or its others. She writes, "Anger is creative; it works to create a language with which to respond to that which one is against, whereby 'the

13 bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1996); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

14 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 176.

what' is renamed, and brought into a feminist world."[15] Anger has political power not only to bring to light a grievance, or to bring to light the fact that grievances are being obscured. Anger has its own agency, its own creativity, irreducible to the terms of the current world. Anger participates in building a new world, reconfiguring the current world into the "feminist world" to come. Viewed from the perspective of this new world, feminist anger is reasonable, even as it appears unreasonable from the present world: this, Ahmed asserts, is an article of feminist faith. Such faith motivates continued articulation of anger even when it is denounced as irrational. She concludes, "Making public statements, getting heard, writing banners: these remain crucial strategies for feminism, even when they fail to get uptake."[16]

While there is a lively and sophisticated tradition of feminist and Black American reflection on anger in the 1970s, the two most profound theorists of anger—in a certain sense, theologians of anger—are Audre Lorde and María Lugones. Lorde fills out the relationship between the world to come, announced by anger, and anger's effects in this world. It is not simply that anger describes the feminist faithful, on her account. Rather, for Lorde, attempting to give voice to anger points to a future world but is also an "act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies."[17] This is a highly suggestive, if highly elusive, proposal. Lorde is asserting that, given the way our world is filled with systems of domination, and so qualitatively different from the future world announced by anger, expressions of anger in our world will vary significantly, both in form and in object. These variations provide an occasion for reflection and theoretical refinement. But it will also be the case that some anger is worldly, not other-worldly. If this is the case, no alliance is possible; negotiation would be pointless. Lorde, like Schmitt, takes the distinction between friend and enemy to point to the root of politics. But whereas Schmitt's account of the relationship with an enemy has no connection with emotion and is entirely worldly, essential for social order, Lorde's account of the enemy grows out of her reflection on anger and is, essentially, a distinction between the godly and the demonic. She writes of the need to discern who will pull you beyond the world, toward a new world beyond domination, and who will keep you in the world, forever subject to systems of domination. Lorde here is careful not to arrogate to herself the

15 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 176.

16 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 177.

17 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 127.

ultimate power to judge. She describes herself as possessing "anger, not moral authority."[18] It is in dialogue with others that anger gains its authority, and then only provisionally—at least this side of the world to come. And in the world to come, the world without domination, there will be no need for anger.

The Argentinian feminist philosopher María Lugones similarly takes anger to have the potential to point beyond the world, but she argues that this is not the case with all anger.[19] She distinguishes ordinary anger, responsive to wrongs within a given normative order, from a deeper sort of anger, hard-to-handle anger, that is illegible within a given normative order and so signals the limits of that order. When a given normative order is infected with systems of domination, such as racism or patriarchy, dominated communities, such as women or racial minorities, are pulled in as participants of that normative order by anger of the first sort. To use a simplistic example, a patriarchal culture considers it wrong for a woman not to defer to her male colleague, and her colleague (or some other male and female colleagues) may react with anger if she withholds deference. Such anger could have the effect of pulling the woman back into the normative order, back toward acting with deference to male colleagues. Attending to hard-to-handle anger would remind the woman that the normative order is not all there is, it does not have the last word—and so she may be confident in ignoring her colleague's anger. In other words, hard-to-handle anger can allow those subject to domination to be indifferent to the anger of those who dominate them because they have faith that this world does not have the last word.

Lugones suggests that we understand hard-to-handle anger as rage, a form of "separatist" anger.[20] Each person who experiences it stands apart from the normative order in which she or he lives. They each stand apart but form a community of singularities, a church of rage, if you will. As Lugones puts it, anger "echoes across different worlds of sense."[21] Those who participate in the church of rage are each grossly distorted by the normative orders in which they live, in which they have been formed, but they recognize that they, in some way, in their souls perhaps, exceed these orders. They recognize—or, as Lugones puts it, giving agency to the emotion, "anger recognizes"—"the need for creating not just a different speech but a different self."[22] What could we call this vision of a new self, redeemed, free, if not theological?

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18 Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 132.

19 María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

20 Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 115.

21 Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 115.

22 Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 114.

In short, when we turn to marginalized voices, we find anger that embraces a theological rather than a secular idiom. We find anger marking an instance of domination rather than anger marking a moral wrong or social disorder. We find anger motivating interrogation of systems of domination rather than keeping us within the orbit of the normative order. But is it really appropriate to call such an account of anger *theological* rather than simply, say, radical or revolutionary?

3 Anger, Theologically

One way of motivating the label, *theological*, would be to demonstrate, as my title promised, that anger can be a secularized theological concept, that is, by telling a history about how a concept that was once part of a religious tradition's vocabulary migrated to a political space where it took on a life disconnected from that religious tradition. In contrast, so far I have suggested that two concepts of anger circulate in accounts of politics, one concept secularist, committed to the ultimate authority of the world, and the other not secularist, refusing the ultimate authority of the world. Grand historical narratives of secularization are often distracting, drawing our attention to monumental or antiquarian historical interests and away from the project of critique.[23] Nevertheless, I will gesture toward two historical stories, one of Athens, the other of Jerusalem, that we might see lying behind the two accounts of anger I limned.

The first story begins, in fact, even before Athens, with the advent of Greek literature: μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος. Rage, sing goddess of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus. These, the first lines of the first work of Greek literature, the *Iliad*, name that text's central theme: anger. The son of a king and a goddess, Achilles becomes increasingly enraged over the course of the poem, acts on that rage, enraging others, who act on their rage, enraging Achilles, and on and on. In this drama both humans and gods are involved, and both become enraged; Achilles himself stands between the two realms of beings. This is an honor society, and it is violations of honor that enrage. The *Iliad* is a story of anger, and it is anger narrated: the opening line implores the goddess to represent rage in verse, teaching a society about honor and anger.

In the years that followed, managing anger would become a central preoccupation of classical moral thought, with opinions varying on whether anger ought to be properly expressed in moderation (Aristotle) or stamped out

23 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations,* trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 57–123.

altogether (the Stoics).[24] Aeschylus portrays the management of anger as the crucial step in the founding of Athens. The drama of the Eumenides consists of rage personified, the Furies, pursuing the protagonist Orestes. But, unlike in the *Iliad*, in the Eumenides the goddess Athena intervenes. She sets up and presides over a court of justice. Orestes wins, and the Furies are domesticated. Now, violations of honor are treated as moral wrongs, violations of the social order, to be rectified in court. No longer does anger, proclaimed by the gods, fuel vengeance unlimited. Athena creates order for Athens, and anger becomes terminable through a divinely ordained, human court. Here we have, according to Alasdair MacIntyre, the beginning of moral philosophy.[25]

The *Iliad* and the Eumenides, read together, suggest something like a story of secularization, with unlimited divine anger becoming human anger—within a carefully managed social order. But, in another sense, all of this is happening in the world. The Greek gods inhabited the world of the Greek humans. Violation of a god's honor and violation of human honor were not qualitatively different, and response to such violations through vengeance outside of a court and within a court were not qualitatively different, either.

Rather than forcing secularization onto the Greeks, let us turn, instead, to Jerusalem. The Hebrew Bible is famously full of anger: human anger, God's anger, and the anger of the prophets, humans standing as a bridge to the divine. This is complex scholarly terrain.[26] There are nine different Hebrew words that mean something like anger in the Bible. In a careful study of Biblical anger language, Deena Grant argues that there is overlap between how anger words are applied to humans and to God, but there are also significant differences.[27] Anger in the Hebrew Bible is closely associated with authority. Figures in authority—particularly, patriarchs, and God as patriarch—become angered when their authority is challenged or ignored. This is, according to Grant, "virtually the exclusive trigger of biblical anger."[28] Anger is always accompanied

24 William Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

25 Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

26 See Michael McCarthy, "Divine Wrath and Human Anger: Embarrassment Ancient and New," *Theological Studies* 70, no. 4 (2009): 845–874; Ronald Clements, "Prophecy, Ethics, and the Divine Anger," in *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament: God and Humans in Dialogue*, ed. Katherine Dell (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 88–102; William Mattison, "Jesus' Prohibition of Anger (Mt 5:22): The Person/Sin Distinction from Augustine to Aquinas," *Theological Studies* 68, no. 4 (2007): 839–864.

27 Deena Grant, *Divine Anger in the Hebrew Bible* (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2014).

28 Grant, *Divine Anger in the Hebrew Bible*, 167.

by the capacity to respond: when an authority figure, including God, is challenged, consequences often follow—consequences that are more severe for those outside the authority figure's family or community. While in the Hebrew Bible human anger destroys or expels those who challenge patriarchal authority, divine anger solicits the repentance of the Israelites.

Authority, not honor: the Biblical tradition of anger stands in sharp contrast to the Greek tradition. And God stands as ultimate authority. Divine anger undercuts, and so relativizes, the authority of any human family or community. Here we have an account of anger more closely resembling the anger voiced by marginalized communities. What if we understand some such anger—hard-to-handle anger, rage—as prophetic? In that case, it would channel an authority beyond the world, inscrutable from the perspective of the world. But it would not immediately take anyone out of the world: local normative orders persist, even as their authority is no longer recognized as ultimate. Moreover, discerning how to live faithful to that ultimate authority signaled by rage, divine or prophetic, requires discernment. The wisdom of the prophets must be read together with others since no one human alone has the answer; otherwise, it would be worldly anger at issue, not divine. It would be a god, not prophets, voicing anger.

Authority, not honor. In a sense, we are back to sovereignty, back to the paradigm of political theology. In the Hebrew Bible, anger and sovereignty (of God, of household head) go together. Anger is a secularized theological concept because sovereignty is a secularized theological concept. But taking this claim seriously means that we must reconsider where legitimate sovereignty is located. There are purported sovereigns who do not experience anger, just as there is anger that is not theological. What should interest us are claims to sovereign authority that accompany anger, and these are claims we find in populist movements. They are angry claims to the sovereignty of the people, or of indigenous peoples, or of women—that is, claims to authority unfettered by the world, untrammeled by systems of domination. Such angry claims are always opaque, but attending to them is essential political work. This work begins with clarifying which systems of domination are at work and how they are at work. Domination, after all, is a claim to ultimate authority, and this is what hard-to-handle anger puts in relief. Discernment of anger is not theoretical work, but practical work; not individual work, but collaborative and coalitional work. To invoke another theological idiom, it is the work of repentance.[29]

29 Material from this chapter was earlier published in Vincent Lloyd, "Anger: A Secularized Theological Concept," *Political Theology* 22 (forthcoming). For further reflections on analyzing anger in social movements, see Vincent Lloyd, *Black Dignity: A Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

CHAPTER 3

"Just because You're Paranoid Doesn't Mean They're Not after You": Populism, Political Theology, and the Culturally Repugnant Other

Thomas Lynch

Populism has joined religious fundamentalism as one of the frequently invoked threats to contemporary liberal democracies.[1] Variously defined, this populism is crass—the "awkward guest" at the political dinner party.[2] Like the terms it is defined with and against—liberalism, democracy, the West, and civilization—its utility stems from its ambiguity. Populism is more often a charge that is levelled than a label that is adopted or a description that facilitates understanding. It is a 'bad' used to define a 'good.'

Despite this ambiguity, the critique of populism is itself informative, particularly when viewed in relation to conspiracism. Populism and conspiracism are historically and conceptually intertwined. While not all conspiracism lends itself to populism and not all populisms employ conspiratorial narratives, there is a significant overlap between the two. Establishing the borders that separate populism and conspiracism from democracy and independent, rational thought delineates the field of political legitimacy. Yet the critiques that draw these borders fall prey to the same flaws that delegitimate populism and conspiracism: offering reductive analyses, moralizing conflicts, and employing conspiratorial logics.

While hypocrisy can be a cheap critique, in this instance it reveals a fundamental problem. There is a difference between excluding a certain political style on the basis that it violates the procedures of liberal democracy, and opposing certain ideas, figures, or movements on the basis of their content. The former raises questions about the management and disciplining of

1 In his *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 26, William A. Galston defines liberal democracy in terms of "the republican principle, democracy, constitutionalism, and liberalism." I am less interested in defending one account of liberal democracy than in considering liberal democracy as a political identity that is positioned against populism and defined, however vaguely, through this opposition.

2 Benjamin Arditi, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: Difference, Populism, Agitation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 78.

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dissent—believe what you want so long as you do it politely—while the latter raises questions about pluralism and tolerance of the "repugnant cultural other."[3] I will argue the charge of populism is a way of distancing a group of ideas, logics, or styles that one finds objectionable, while simultaneously repressing the fact that these same dynamics are at work in liberal democracy. None of these complications detract from the fact that many populist groups today espouse racist and xenophobic ideas. The task is to identify what is wrong with these groups: is it their populism or their racism?

After briefly defining populism as a political style and explaining how conspiracism features in its epistemic practices, I will argue that they are excessive forms of the liberal democratic virtues of self-reflection and skepticism. These excesses are messy reactions to real problems to which liberal democratic institutions struggle to respond. Condemnations of both populism and conspiracism have their own Manichean tendencies that say as much about the liberal democratic political imaginary as those who do not fit comfortably within that mold.[4] Focusing on QAnon as an example of widely derided conspiratorial thinking, I will conclude the problem is not populist style or conspiratorial thinking, but political antagonisms.[5]

1 The Populist Style and Its Conspiratorial Dimensions

While populism has been variously described as an ideology, logic, discourse, and strategy[6], I follow Benjamin Moffitt in understanding populism as a political style defined by (1) appeals to the people, (2) the declarations of crisis,

3 Susan Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Culturally Repugnant Other," *Social Research* 58, no. 2 (1991): 373–393.

4 On these Manichean tendencies see Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

5 QAnon is a set of conspiratorial ideas that defy quick summary. Perhaps the most succinct account is offered by Kevin Roose, who defines it as "the umbrella term for a sprawling set of internet conspiracy theories that allege, falsely, that the world is run by a cabal of Satan-worshiping pedophiles who are plotting against Mr. Trump while operating a global child sex-trafficking ring." See his overview in "What Is QAnon, the Viral Pro-Trump Conspiracy Theory?" *The New York Times*, September 1, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-qanon.html (accessed September 23, 2020). For a detailed account of the global reach of these ideas, see Chine Labbe, et. al., "QAnon's Deep State conspiracies spread to Europe," *NewsGuard*, https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-report-qanon/ (accessed September 14, 2020).

6 For a concise summary of these categorizations, see Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey, "Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style," *Political Studies* 62, no. 2 (2014): 383–386.

breakdown, or threat, and (3) bad manners (refusing to abide by political norms).[7] Moffitt's approach is advantageous in allowing one to examine populist movements as a global phenomenon that exists across the political spectrum rather than basing one's analysis on the European or American far right alone.[8] Populism is thus understood as a style that can be used more or less consistently by both individuals and groups. It may be true that Nigel Farage and Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom or Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the United States each employ the populist style, but they employ that style in different ways, in different contexts, and to different ends.

These defining characteristics of the populist style have an epistemic dimension. In building the opposition between the people and the elites, populist movements claim to be rooted in the experience-based knowledge of everyday people as opposed to the abstract and overly intellectualized knowledge of academics, experts, and politicians.[9] Complementing this obvious truth of the common person is a belief in the superior rationality of the people. The overly intellectualized knowledge of the elites is not only out of touch with ordinary experiences but is warped by their biases.[10] Charges of Islamophobia, for example, are dismissed because phobias are irrational fears rather than reasoned assessments. The assertion of this counter-knowledge also frequently violates good 'political manners' and relishes being against 'political correctness.'[11]

It is important to emphasize both the common sense and hyper-rationality of the people in order to avoid reducing populist modes of knowing to the folksy wisdom of a politician like Sarah Palin. While she is representative of one form of populist knowledge, populism also includes an emphasis on

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7 Moffitt and Tormey, "Rethinking Populism," 391–392. For a more in-depth discussion of these elements, see Benjamin Moffitt's *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

8 On the dangers of emphasizing the far right in discussions of populism, see Yannis Stavrakakis, Giorgos Katsambekis, Nikos Nikisianis, Alexandros Kioupkiolis, and Thomas Siomos, "Extreme right-wing populism in Europe: revisiting a reified association," *Critical Discourse Studies* 14, no. 4 (2017): 420–439.

9 Paul Saurette and Shane Gunster, "Ears Wide Shut: Epistemological Populism, Argutainment and Canadian Conservative Talk Radio," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de science politique* 44, no. 1 (2011): 195–218.

10 Tuukka Ylä-Anttila, writing about the Finnish context, emphasizes this superior rationality as "a particular kind of objectivist counter-expertise" in "Populist knowledge: 'Post-truth' repertoires of contesting epistemic authorities," *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 5, no. 4 (2018): 356–388, at 358.

11 The rejection of political correctness is a frequent theme in studies of populism. See for example, Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, 61; Rogers Brubaker, "Why populism?" *Theory and Society* 46, no. 5 (2017), 357–385, at 372.

statistics, evidence, and rigorous argumentation. Whether or not this form of knowledge is *really* drawing on statistics, evidence, or rigorous argumentation is beside the point. It is the performance of rigor that informs the populist style. It is this superior knowledge that allows populists to discern the impending crisis or threat that is loudly declared, social norms be damned.

The populist style thus celebrates 'the people' through a critique of elitist forms of knowledge and it is here that conspiracism comes into play. The connection between populism and conspiracism is well established. At the most basic level, conspiracism provides narratives that support simplified or binary worldviews. Confronted with a complex, chaotic, and rapidly changing world, it provides order. With its suspicions of global elites and distrust of official accounts, it is particularly amenable to populism.[12] The histories of theorizing populism and conspiracism are also linked. Richard Hofstadter, whose essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" is a key text for those working on conspiracism, also wrote a history of American reform movements that begins with the development of the Populist movement in the nineteenth century.[13] He argues that conspiratorial thinking marks populism from the outset. Hofstadter draws this connection in the course of critiquing both populism and conspiracism. They are presented as irrational phenomena that threaten the political order. They are pathologized, literally and figuratively.[14]

As Jack Bratich argues, the pathological nature of populism and conspiracism lies in their excessive manifestation, and thus distortion, of liberal democratic virtues.[15] It would be too simplistic to argue that there is a clearly definable liberal democratic norm but, following Benjamin Arditi, one can identify a liberal democratic imaginary in which 'sovereign individuals' participate in the

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12 Bruno Castanho Silva, Federico Vegetti, and Levente Littvay, "The Elite Is Up to Something: Exploring the Relation Between Populism and Belief in Conspiracy Theories," *Swiss Political Science Review* 23, no. 4 (2017): 423–443, at 427–428. Silva, Vegetti, and Littivay are clear that there is a correlation rather than a causal relation between populism and conspiracism. They also show that conspiracy theories often entail beliefs about government malfeasance that extend beyond common populist positions.

13 Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 3–40. For his history of reform movements see *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage, 1955).

14 Jack Z. Bratich, *Conspiracy Panics: Political Rationality and Popular Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 5.

15 Jack Z. Bratich, "Making Politics Reasonable: Conspiracism, Subjectification, and Governing through Styles of Thought," in *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality*, ed. Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer, and Cameron McCarthy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 67–100, at 81–82.

electoral process, parties represent the will of these individuals and vie with one another for power, and there are open deliberations between representatives who seek to enact laws.[16] These processes all happen as part of a state that is "neutral with regard to the competing conceptions of the good" and in which the government generally reflects the opinions of its citizens.[17] Such processes require a set of virtues including self-reflection and skepticism.[18] Self-reflection is necessary so that citizens can take rational actions in the advancement of their own self-interest. In order to do so, these citizens should be skeptical both about the government and the information that guides their actions. This skepticism is not the same as distrust but means the limits and limitations of government are a persistent question. Similarly, citizens should be skeptical of the information that they encounter on social media and in traditional media outlets. Put another way, the sovereign individual is the one capable of the self-reflection and skepticism necessary for participation in and perpetuation of liberal democratic society.

In its conspiracist excess, this skepticism performs an exaggerated form of positivism. By claiming to question everything, it aims to out-science the scientists.[19] Marshalling evidence the elites either ignore or cannot see (due to their multiculturalist biases) gives the people access to the information needed to correct problems such as immigration, poverty, or declining morality.[20] The populist defends this superior knowledge without regard for the good manners of the 'liberal snowflake,' unconcerned with potential for offence.

Consider how these dimensions are at work in debates about immigration. First, elites are depicted as out of touch, living lives removed from the realities of those communities impacted most by immigration. Second, cosmopolitan intellectuals are ridiculed for their inability to rationally consider the 'reality' of the situation. Academics and policy makers refuse to engage with the reality reflected in statistics about immigration and crime or employment. Or, as one commentator puts it, "not a single expert has questioned his [sic] own beliefs."[21] These excessive forms of skepticism and self-reflection play off one

16 Arditi, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism*, 1–2.

17 Arditi, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism*, 1–2.

18 Bratich, "Making Politics Reasonable", 72

19 Jaron Harambam and Stef Aupers, "Contesting epistemic authority: Conspiracy theories on the boundary of science," *Public Understanding of Science* 24, no. 4 (2015): 466–480, at 473.

20 Ylä-Anttila, "Populist Knowledge," 369.

21 Nitzan David Foucks, "Why Are Elites Out of Touch? They Think Anyone Who Disagrees with Them Is Crazy," *The National Interest*, August 6, 2016, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-are-elites-out-touch-look-what-theyre-saying-17258 (accessed August 10,

another. Hyper-skepticism is necessary to avoid the control of the elites and without this vigilance, 'the people' will be unable to see the reality of the situation and engage in the genuine self-reflection necessary for self-rule. Those who subscribe to conspiracies such as QAnon frequently reject the label of conspiracy theory, emphasize the intensity of their skepticism, and implore those who question these beliefs to do their own research.[22]

While these epistemic tendencies can be populist without being conspiratorial, there is a natural affinity between the two. Conspiracism injects the affirmation of the people into knowledge itself, presenting a "democratized form of skepticism and radical doubt" freed from the controlling interests of elites.[23] In moments where it becomes harder to differentiate between conspiracism and valid skepticism, the need to reinforce the boundary between the two becomes all the more important.[24] The ability to rationally distinguish conspiracy from legitimate belief or valid democratic activism from populism is itself a marker of rationality. It establishes us and them.[25]

Conspiracism also plays a vital role in connecting the often disparate array of dissatisfactions that mobilize populist movements. As Ernesto Laclau argues in his influential work, populism operates through the formation of equivalential chains that connect otherwise independent political demands: "each individual demand is constitutively split: on the one hand it is its own particularised self; on the other it points, through equivalential links, to the totality of the other demands."[26] Moffitt, drawing on Laclau, argues that the populist logic of crisis links "failures in an attempt to homogenise a disparate set of phenomena as symptoms of a wider crisis, with these discrete 'failures' contextualised in the form of a temporally bounded and significant event."[27] Building

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2020). In the UK, debates about immigration in the lead up to Brexit often focused on out of touch elites. See for example the language used in Ian Drury, "Metropolitan elite are out of touch with ordinary, 'ghastly' Britons, says ex-BBC chief: Leaked email says Establishment 'ignores and despises' millions because they do not embrace liberal views," *MailOnline*, June, 23 2016, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3657284/We-touch-ordinary-ghastly-Britons-says-ex-BBC-chief-Leaked-email-says-ignores-despises-millions-not-embrace-liberal-views.html (accessed August 10, 2020).

22 See for example, the people interviewed in Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," *The Atlantic*, June 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/ (accessed September 16, 2020).

23 Harambam and Aupers, "Contesting epistemic authority," 473.

24 Bratich, *Conspiracy Panic*, 37

25 Bratich, *Conspiracy Panics*, 47.

26 Ernesto Laclau, "Populism: What's in a Name?" in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005), 32–49, at 37.

27 Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, 122.

these connections does not require conspiratorial thinking, but conspiracism is certainly a resource. It is difficult to explain why European politicians are so eager to facilitate the Islamization of their countries, but if they are doing so to gain access to oil, then there is at least a rationale.[28] Conspiracism thus also serves to connect opposition to elites and to the scapegoating of minority communities who must be simultaneously culturally deficient and capable of destroying the nation.[29]

Populism and conspiracism, both individually and together, are sites of epistemic contestation. They pose the knowledge of the people against the cosmopolitan biases of the elites. Populism and conspiracism draw on features of liberal democracy, namely self-reflection and skepticism, but in ways that are judged to be aberrant. Making these judgments is made only more difficult by the fact that there are genuine oppositions between ordinary people and the elites. And how is one to judge what is a conspiracy theory when, from Bohemian Grove to Russian interference in elections, it seems like reality is filled with conspiracies?[30] When Jeffrey Epstein—a wealthy businessman friend to presidents, royals, and intellectuals—is found to have engaged in international sex trafficking on his private island, the notion that politicians are running a pedophile ring out of a pizza restaurant starts to seem less implausible.[31] Seem-

28 Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, "When the Elders of Zion relocated to Eurabia: conspiratorial racialization in antisemitism and Islamophobia," *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 4 (2018): 314–337.

29 On this connection see Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, 43.

30 Bohemian Grove is a secretive summer camp for rich and powerful men in the United States, including politicians, owners of media companies, and major businessmen. See Philip Weiss's expose "Inside Bohemian Grove," *Spy Magazine*, November 1989, 59–76, or the less sensationalist, but briefer, account provided in Elizabeth Flock, "Bohemian Grove: Where the rich and powerful go to misbehave," *Washington Post*, June 15, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/bohemian-grove-where-the-rich-and-powerful-go-to-misbehave/2011/06/15/AGPV1sVH_blog.html (accessed August 10, 2020).

31 For a brief summary of the Jeffrey Epstein case, see "Jeffrey Epstein: The financier charged with sex trafficking," *BBC*, November 16, 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-48913377 (accessed August 10, 2020). While Epstein's connections to the Clintons, Trump, and Prince Andrew has received much media attention, there has been less devoted to his relationships with prominent scientists and his interest in using his DNA as part of a eugenics project. James B. Stewart, Matthew Goldstein and Jessica Silver-Greenberg, "Jeffrey Epstein Hoped to Seed Human Race With His DNA," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/31/business/jeffrey-epstein-eugenics.html (accessed August 10, 2020). On the pizzagate conspiracy theory, see Cecilia Kang and Adam Goldman, "In Washington Pizzeria Attack, Fake News Brought Real Guns," *The New York Times*, December 5, 2016, nytimes.com/2016/12/05/business/media/comet-ping-pong-pizza-shooting-fake-news-consequences.html (accessed August 10, 2020).

ingly new conspiracies such as QAnon frequently draw on more established forms of conspiratorial thinking, particularly those rooted in antisemitism and Islamophobia, and their plausibility trades on the fact that these theories have become embedded in more mainstream discourse.[32] This process of delineating conspiracy theories and unsettling realities is an important site of epistemic contestation in which the rational is separated from the aberrant.

2 The Critique of the Critique of Populism and Conspiracism

One way of describing this epistemic contestation is to return to the language of excess. An excess is only an excess in relation to a norm, just as a fringe is only a fringe in relation to a center.[33] My argument is that highlighting populism and conspiracism as problems in themselves creates an antagonism between different forms of thought and rival knowledges.[34] This cycle of positioning the liberal democratic norm against the populist conspiratorial excess ignores the way that the critiques of populism and conspiracism replicate the very things they critique: reductive binaries, moralizing approaches, and conspiratorial logics.

First, both populism and conspiracism are critiqued for reducing complex situations to crude binaries and providing simplistic solutions. Yet both of these terms, whether used academically or in the media, have the same polarizing effect. They allow a series of disparate ideas, figures, and movements to be lumped together in a way that may not amount to dismissal, but at least puts those ideas into a category that is evaluated differently than other (serious) political proposals. They are pathological forms of irrationality. This pathologization ranges from arguments that populism stems from a mixture of anger, resentment, and shame experienced both individually and as intergroup emotions to, more casual uses of terms like paranoia to describe conspiratorial tendencies.[35] They are depicted as fringes in relation to a center. Indeed, the rejection of populism and conspiracism serves to negatively establish the

32 Julia Carrie Wong, "QAnon explained: the antisemitic conspiracy theory gaining traction around the world," *The Guardian*, August 25, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/25/qanon-conspiracy-theory-explained-trump-what-is (accessed September 14, 2020).

33 Bratich, "Making Politics Reasonable," 79.

34 Bratich, *Conspiracy Panics*, 11.

35 For an overview of this literature see Mikko Salmela and Christian von Scheve, "Emotional roots of right-wing political populism," *Social Science Information* 56, no. 4 (2017): 567–595.

liberal democratic norm, as many analyses of both populism and conspiracism have shown. Panics over populism and conspiracism are vital to the defining "the normal modes of assent".[36]

As argued above, populism and conspiracism may be deviances, but this is a question of degree rather than kind. Viewing populism and conspiracism as excesses shows that they do not reject the epistemic norms of liberal democracy, but are invested in rationality, evidence, and argument.[37] Rather than the norms themselves, they reject the claim that the elites are actually committed to these ideals. It is "the multiculturalist elite" who are "post-truth."[38] But if they are deviances, they are very common ones. As Cas Mudde has shown, populism does not traffic in ideas that are completely different from the mainstream.[39]

Second, one of the objections levelled against populism is that it frames political opposition in moralizing terms. Opponents do not merely hold different positions; they are corrupt, if not evil. Yet this critique displays its own moralizing tendencies in the guise of proceduralism. Rather than condemning the substance of a political position, critics focus on the style of communication. Uncivil is the new evil.

Finally, there is a conspiratorial logic that serves to explain the success of populists. People are victims of populism, unable or unwilling to see how populist leaders are really cold and distant elites manipulating the masses in their own quest for power. These critiques adopt a patronizing view of those seduced by these leaders. Whether the blame is on the media (clouding public debate with click-bait headlines and little concern for truth), lack of education, or poverty, there is a kind of conspiratorial logic at work. The most sympathetic version of this critique is what Bratich calls "the sociocultural approach" to conspiracy theories.[40] Belief in conspiracies may have understandable foundations in social and political reality but err in their interpretation of that reality.[41] This language of manipulation and control can even be found in otherwise nuanced accounts of populism.[42]

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36 Jack Z. Bratich, *Conspiracy Panics*, 11. Bratich's focus here is on conspiracism, but the argument clearly extends to populism.

37 Ylä-Anttila, "Populist knowledge," 362.

38 Ylä-Anttila, "Populist knowledge," 358.

39 Cas Mudde, "The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy," *West European Politics* 33, no. 6 (2010): 1167–1186, at 1178.

40 Bratich, *Conspiracy Panics*, 102–103.

41 Bratich, *Conspiracy Panics*, 111.

42 See for example María Pía Lara, "The term 'Populism' as a combat-concept and a catchword," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 45, no. 9–10 (2019): 1144–1156, at 1146, 1151.

This conspiratorial logic extends to fears of conspiracy theories themselves. Most recently, there has been a surge in reporting on the QAnon conspiracy. While this theory is rightly critiqued for propagating racist and xenophobic views, much of the reporting ignores the fact that (at least at the time of writing) most Americans have never heard of QAnon.[43] It is easier to believe that the irrational belief of a network of conspiracy theorists will help guide Trump to re-election than to confront the garden variety racism and widespread xenophobia that have been a constant in American electoral politics.

Critiques of both populism and conspiracism, especially the ones that focus on populism centered on a charismatic leader, offer their own conspiratorial theories. In doing so, they reinforce a binary division, not between the people and the elite, but between us (the rational, the civil, the tolerant) and them (the irrational, paranoid, crazy, rude, bigoted, and intolerant). The labelling of groups as populist or ideas as conspiratorial is a way of marking them as irrational, inflected with affects and energies that liberal democratic politics has tamed or sublimated. Our politics is constituted as rational and legitimate through this process of exclusion, which in turn re-entrenches the divisions that animate the populist style in the first place. This opposition occludes the way that these features of populism appear within liberal democracy, a form of politics has never been as inclusive as we would like to pretend, that is selective in which nuances are acknowledged, and that is not the domain of rational agents. Downplaying the role of identification, emotional connection, and libidinal investment in *all* politics presents populism as uniquely problematic. This opposition reinforces the sense of being aggrieved, marginalized, and looked down upon. If one of the objections to populism is its antagonism and inability to enter into genuine dialogue with others, surely this deepening is also problematic.

3 Populism and Conspiracism: New Culturally Repugnant Others

Approaching populism and conspiracism with an awareness of how these concepts function allows one to view both as forms of counterknowledge.[44] In challenging the elites, populists found an alternative epistemic community.[45] Or, to use other Foucauldian language, populism and conspiracism can

43 Wong, "QAnon explained." This chapter was written before the 2020 election and the events of January 6, 2021. Following both these events, QAnon has become a more household name.

44 Ylä-Anttila, "Populist knowledge," 359.

45 Ylä-Anttila, "Populist knowledge," 359–360.

function as forms of subjugated knowledge.[46] This shift in focus highlights how the accusation of populism or conspiracism often ignores the correctness of claims or the aptness of demands, focusing instead on the violation of norms and procedures. There is a difference between opposing populist right-wing groups because they are racist and opposing them because they are populist, just like there is a difference between opposing the QAnon conspiracy because it repeats antisemitic tropes and rejecting it because it is conspiratorial. My argument is that highlighting populism and conspiracism as problems in themselves creates an antagonism between different forms of thought and rival knowledges.[47] And this antagonism both depoliticizes legitimate grievances and affirms a vision of the liberal democratic norm.

Considering populism and fanaticism in terms of counterknowledge highlights a significant connection to postmodern philosophy. Without endorsing simplistic narratives of postmodern philosophy leading to post-truth politics, it is noteworthy that concepts that are indebted to postmodern philosophy appear in populist and conspiracist discourse. Concepts such as cognitive bias, which are fundamentally about the relationship between power and knowledge, appear as ways of legitimating the rejection of elite forms of knowledge.[48] Leaving aside the question of whether postmodernism aimed at destabilizing 'grand narratives' or merely observed their collapse, postmodern philosophy did identify a relationship between power and knowledge that undermined notions of truth vital to politics. In so doing, it has contributed to the "epistemological insecurity" in which conspiracism operates.[49]

Evaluating populism and conspiracism as forms of counterknowledge does not mean an endorsement of any or all of the ideas, figures or movements currently operating under those labels, but it does change the way they are approached. Here, earlier work on fundamentalism can serve as a guide to thinking about marginalized and excluded forms of knowledge. In a now classic essay on fundamentalists as "culturally repugnant others," Susan Harding identifies many of the same patterns I have been describing with reference to populism and conspiracism. The extent to which her opening statement on fundamentalism equally applies to populism is striking: "From the modern point of view, the word 'fundamentalist' conjures up a jumbled and troubling universe of connotations, clichés, images, feelings, poses, and plots: militant, strident, dogmatic, ignorant, duped, backward, rural, southern, uneducated, antiscientific, anti-intellectual, irrational, absolutist, authoritarian,

46 Jack Z. Bratich, *Conspiracy Panics*, 7.
47 Bratich, *Conspiracy Panics*, 11.
48 Ylä-Anttila. "Populist knowledge", 370.
49 Harambam and Aupers, "Contesting epistemic authority," 467.

reactionary, bigoted, racist, sexist, anticommunist, war mongers. You cannot reason with them."[50] For Harding, it is the "modern subject" that is constructed through this description of fundamentalism.[51]

Harding, in describing the events of the 1925 Scopes trial, explains how the journalists and observers constitute the fundamentalist as an object to be studied or mocked. The fundamentalists present at the trial "were othered '*live,*'" fully aware of the fact that they were being presented as "inferior persons whose very existence required explanation."[52] As noted above, the same dynamic is found in discourse about populism. Leaders employing the populist style tell 'the people' that elites look down upon them. Then elites—including 'we' academics—all too readily take up that role. 'Deplorables' is just a more succinct version of 'culturally repugnant others.'[53] In a trend made popular by Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* (and continued under new host Trevor Noah), comedians show up at political rallies to question the populist horde while back at home 'we' point and laugh, incredulous at 'those' people.[54]

More recently, journalists have been interviewing the followers of Q—the anonymous figure who claims to be releasing highly classified information that foretells Trump's defeat of corrupt elites, the overthrow of the "deep state," and the inauguration of the "Great Awakening."[55] The people interviewed are described in predictable ways: voices lower conspiratorially as an "uncanny flash" of pathological irrationality passes behind a façade of normality;[56] the empiricist rigor of the reporter is contrasted with the frightening and bizarre theories of the conspiracists;[57] they are grouped together as members of a viral cult—an intellectual pandemic imitating and feeding off the uncertainty of the medical pandemic with which it has coincided;[58] and the reports are illus-

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50 Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism," 373.

51 Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism," 374.

52 Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism," 390.

53 Ben Jacobs, "Hillary Clinton calls half of Trump supporters bigoted 'deplorables,'" *The Guardian*, September 10, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/sep/10/hillary-clinton-trump-supporters--bigoted-deplorables (accessed August 20, 2020).

54 "Jordan Klepper vs. Trump Supporters, The Daily Show," *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzDhm8o8oU4 (accessed June 23, 2020).

55 LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q."

56 Charlotte Alter, "How Conspiracy Theories Are Shaping the 2020 Election—and Shaking the Foundation of American Democracy," *Time*, September 10, 2020, https://time.com/5887437/conspiracy-theories-2020-election/ (accessed September 15, 2020).

57 Dave Davies, "Journalist Enters The World Of QAnon: 'It's Almost Like A Bad Spy Novel,'" *NPR*, August 20, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/08/20/904237192/journalist-enters-the-world-of-qanon-it-s-almost-like-a-bad-spy-novel (accessed September 23, 2020).

58 Jamie Doward, "'Quite frankly terrifying': How the QAnon conspiracy theory is taking root in the UK," *The Guardian*, September 20, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/20/the-qanon-conspiracy (accessed September 25, 2020).

trated with images of protestors, sometimes angry, holding placards and looking defiantly into the camera.

In drawing on Harding there is good cause to emphasize the role of the audience for this reporting—the 'us.' This is the role played by most people who will read this chapter—someone who reacts with dismay to the latest Trump tweet or Boris gaff. There is a complex dynamic whereby would be populist leaders claim to speak for 'the people,' a group brought into being through this declaration.[59] Effective leaders are able to make this claim in a convincing way, using the populist style to create an opposition to 'the elites' and refusing the norms of political discourse as they 'say what everyone is thinking.' But the audience is not just those who are becoming 'the people.' It is everyone who does not identify with that label as well. And as 'the elite' watch the 'people' be orated into being, their reactions become part of the dynamic that gathers 'the people' together.

If populism relies, first and foremost, on an opposition between us and them, one strategy open to the audience is to undermine that division wherever possible. Harding has suggestions about how to rethink approaches to those labeled fundamentalists and, again, her advice is applicable to contemporary engagements with populism and conspiracism.

> Political judgment and will are not neutralized by understanding fundamentalism as one of modernism's "others." In fact, our sense of political choice is sharpened by deconstructing the totalizing opposition between "us" and "them," because who "we" are no longer depends on notions that assume we already know who "they" are. We—situated, implicated, and self-reflexive—can then come up with more nuanced, complicated, partial, and local readings of who they are and what they are doing and therefore design more effective political strategies to oppose directly the specific positions and policies they advocate. This seems to me better politics than one grounded in a totalizing or uncritical opposition between fundamentalist and modern.[60]

Such an approach avoids pathologizing the 'culturally repugnant other,' recognizes their cultural agency, and acknowledges that these are responses to actual crises within modern life. Rather than 'othering live,' this approach takes populism and conspiracism seriously. Recognizing an idea, figure or movement as rational and viable is not the same as endorsing that idea, figure or movement.

59 Moffitt and Tormey, "Rethinking Populism," 389.
60 Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism," 393.

Rather, it is to grant that populism emerges in reaction to genuinely felt frustrations with long standing, historically rooted, systemic problems.

4 After Populism and Conspiracism: The Possibility of the Enemy

Like many academics who work at the intersection of religion, philosophy, and politics, I look around the United States and Europe and see worrying trends: ever more overt forms of racism (combined with the persistent, structural, often less visible forms of racism), hyper-nationalism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia. It is a toxic stew of misogyny laced racial resentment bubbling up in violent acts, online culture, and political parties, all presented in a populist style and thoroughly seasoned with conspiracy theories. At the level of both theory and practice it is necessary to critique and resist those ideas. But the way that this epistemic contestation unfolds often winds up re-entrenching the divisions that fuel populism. Rather than dismissing these ideas, figures, and movements on the basis of style, they should be taken seriously and confronted on the basis of their substance. Conspiratorial thinking can be problematic—unless one is confronted with a conspiracy. And the populist style may not be sustainable, but that does not mean it cannot play a role in certain political situations.[61] After all, if elites control liberal democratic institutions and use the norms of those institutions to exclude groups from political life, it might be a situation in which 'the people' should violate those norms. That in no way means that the racism, xenophobia, nationalism, or misogyny that characterizes many forms of populism should be condoned, but the terms used to critique those ideas matter.[62] Though the term populism may serve an analytic function, using it to disqualify or delegitimate only further alienates those that 'we' are purportedly trying to understand. Critiques of the populist style also defend a political etiquette which can be easily turned against those combatting the racism, xenophobia, nationalism, or misogyny for which populism is criticized.[63]

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61 Jean Comaroff, "Populism and Late Liberalism: A Special Affinity?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 637, no. 1 (September 2011): 99–111, at 103.

62 María Pía Lara, "The term 'Populism,'" 1151.

63 See for or example David Starkey's critique of Black Lives Matter which focuses on the movement's purported Manicheanism and moralizing 'us' versus 'them' dynamic. David Starkey, "A Perversion of Puritanism," *The Critic*, June 22, 2020, https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/july-august-2020/a-perversion-of-puritanism-which-aims-to-trash-our-history/ (accessed September 16, 2020).

In repurposing Harding's arguments, the hope is that recognizing populist movements as 'reasonable and viable' responses to the problems of life in contemporary liberal democracies opens up space for dialogue. This recognition is also an opportunity for liberal democratic politics. If antagonistic, reductive, fervent, and emotionally charged populism serves as the foil of an inclusive, nuanced, and rational liberal democracy, then this dialogue can help illuminate aspects of liberal democratic politics that may not be obvious to all citizens.

This recognition also has a darker potential—recognizing a group as offering a reasonable and viable position, avoiding moralizing critiques, but finding dialogue impossible is nearly identical to Carl Schmitt's definition of the enemy. Schmitt argues for a political concept of the enemy. That is, the political designation of the enemy should not be dependent on moral or aesthetic judgments—the essence of the enemy is neither evil nor repugnant.[64] The enemy is "the other, the stranger" and "in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible."[65] Such extreme cases open up the possibility of the "existential negation of the enemy."[66] While Schmitt's legacy is rightly the subject of great debate, his concept of the enemy remains a challenge for those interested in the limits of the political.[67]

It is obvious that Schmitt failed to adhere to this strict definition of the enemy. Still, reading the letter rather than the spirit of his work provides one tool for thinking about irreconcilable political antagonisms. For example, far-right groups throughout the UK and Europe employ the populist style to warn of an immigrant invasion and Islamization of Europe. Focusing on the politics of these movements rather than the style means taking their positions as reasonable and viable variations of ideas that have been part of political and cultural discourse in Europe for as long as there has been the idea of Europe.[68] While adherents of QAnon are described as not "just infected with conspiracy" but "inoculated against reality," the roots of their theories are centuries old.[69]

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64 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26–27.

65 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 27.

66 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 33.

67 The literature on Schmitt's legacy is ever expanding, but see for example Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 1999) and Mark Neocleous, "Friend of Enemy? Reading Schmitt Politically," *Radical Philosophy* 79 (1996), 13–23.

68 See for example, the teratology of Muslim monsters in Sophia Rose Arjana, *Muslims in the Western Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

69 Alter, "How Conspiracy Theories Are Shaping the 2020 Election—and Shaking the Foundation of American Democracy." On these roots see Wong, "QAnon explained."

These are not conspiracy theories; they are conspiracy traditions. Indeed, Adrienne LaFrance, a journalist who has done in-depth reporting on QAnon, argues that the movement is more like a religion than a conspiracy theory.[70]

While using religion as a marker of organized irrationality deserves its own political theological analysis, LaFrance is identifying the risks of approaching QAnon as merely misinformation. It is possible that renewed efforts at providing counterevidence may finally convince people to abandon the antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, and fear of immigrants that animate much of conspiratorial thinking. Given the long history of these ideas it seems unlikely. The forms of racism and xenophobia at the heart of movements like QAnon are entrenched forms of prejudice that have been reified through centuries of violence and political oppression. When isolated as epistemic aberrations, conspiracies become errors to be corrected. When someone arms himself and enters a pizza parlor to confront a child sex trafficking ring run by liberal political elites, it is easy to focus on the outlandish nature of this individual belief.[71] Viewed as a manifestation of a worldview, it becomes clear trusting in the marketplace of ideas will not be sufficient. The more challenging task is to understand the wider set of religious, political, and cultural beliefs that make the outlandish seem plausible.

Populism, as I noted at the beginning, is often regarded as the 'awkward guest' at the political dinner party. This characterization is in keeping with regarding populism as a style. If only the populists—with their conspiracy theories—would behave themselves, they could have a seat at the table. Taking both the style and substance seriously, rather than responding with mockery or disdain, is to confront those ideas, figures, and movements as an existential threat. It is to wonder whether they might be the enemy. Recognizing the utility of populism and conspiracism, not as tools for manipulation but as aspects of a reasonable and viable world view thus requires thinking about political, legal, and social means of existentially negating those views. Shifting from the problem of the populist style to the political struggle against racism and xenophobia means revisiting tactics including no platforming or more militant forms of protest.[72] As there is no sign that racist and xenophobic forms of conspiratorial populism are on the wane, it is necessary to think in terms of opposition rather than conversion. This confrontation is not only or even

70 Davies, "Journalist Enters The World Of QAnon."

71 Kang and Goldman, "In Washington Pizzeria Attack, Fake News Brought Real Guns."

72 On no platforming see Evan Smith, *No Platform: A History of Anti-Fascism, Universities and the Limits of Free Speech* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020). On more militant forms of protest, see Vicky Osterweil, "In Defense of Looting," *The New Inquiry*, August 21, 2014, https://thenewinquiry.com/in-defense-of-looting/ (accessed September 23, 2020).

primarily an intellectual debate. Such an approach is not without its risks, though the same is true of trusting that dialogue and reasoning will overcome centuries old forms of violent prejudice.

Throughout this chapter I have argued that critiques of populism and conspiracism often fall back into the very patterns for which populism and conspiracism are critiqued: offering reductive analyses, moralizing conflicts, and employing conspiratorial logics. Drawing attention to this mirroring, I have also suggested that the denouncements of populism and conspiracism obscure the flaws of liberal democracies. The latter is constructed as rational, civilized, and tolerant against the aberrant other. Denouncing populism as a style risks further alienating the already alienated, confirming their status as the 'culturally repugnant other,' while insufficiently addressing the underlying issues.

When it comes to the English Defence League, Pegida, or QAnon, are they objectionable because they are populist and conspiracist, or because they are xenophobic and racist? If it is the latter, then focusing on style and rhetoric will make for an insufficient response to those who are not merely acting out, but embodying a worldview that denies the humanity of immigrants and racial or religious minorities. Indeed, an adequate response may draw hard boundaries, highlight the moral stakes of discrimination, and trace the web of connections that link the rise of racist and xenophobic groups around the world.

CHAPTER 4

The Politics of Belonging in the Nation State: Reclaiming Christianity from Populism

Mariëtta D. C. van der Tol

The political imaginary of the nation is historically attached to rupture: rupture with a past of social, political, and religious disintegration and rupture with absolutism.[1] The concept of the nation as a new cleavage of belonging appeared in continental constitutions following the French Revolution much before its social, political, and religious crystallization. Its inclusion in constitutions nevertheless proclaimed the sovereignty of "the people," who were understood as "one" and "indivisible."[2] Yet nation states inherited the social, political, and religious fragmentation of early modernity, and the forging of the identity of the nation depended on complex and contested policies of religious moderation, social and economic convergence, as well as a measure of political centralization.[3] The idea of the nation has historically been more reflexive than reflective and even in its reflexive appearance it could not disguise its insecure moorings in either the conception of a civic or an ethnic demos. Is belonging primarily grounded in a culture or political citizenship? Or is belonging primarily grounded in culture and ethnic identity?[4]

1 Marina Valensise, "The French Constitution in Pre-Revolutionary Debate," *The Journal of Modern History* 60, suppl. (1988), 22–57.

2 See articles 1 and 3 of the French Constitution of 1793. See also Art. 5 of the "Dutch Batavian constitution 1798 (*Staatsregeling van het Bataafse volk*)." The preamble and several articles of the Dutch Batavian constitution declare the people to be a "one and indivisible State". See *Verzameling van Staatsregelingen en grondwetten*, ed. Willem J. C. van Hasselt (Alphen a/d Rijn: Samsom, 1964), 17–19, 27.

3 See James McMillan, "'Priest Hits Girl': On the Front Line in the 'War of the Two Frances,'" in *Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth Century Europe*, ed. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003), 77–101; Hans Kippenberg and Ben de Pater, *De eenwording van Nederland* (Nijmegen: Sun, 1988); Naika Foroutan, "Hybride Identitäten. Normalisierung, Konfliktfaktor und Ressource in postmigrantischen Gesellschaften," in *Dabeisein und Dazugehören. Integration in Deutschland,* ed. Heinz Brinkmann and Haci-Hail Uslucan (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2013), 85–102.

4 This distinction between civic and ethnic nationhood was first introduced by Rogers Brubaker, who understood certain nation states as primarily civic (France) or ethnic (Germany) in orientation. See Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

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In his introduction this volume, Ulrich Schmiedel relates the definition of the people to Schmitt's *Political Theology*, which holds that "concepts of the modern theory of the state" are fundamentally "secularized theological concepts."[5] This chapter interprets the 'rupture' that the concept of the nation represents with the continuity that is implied in the idea that concepts of state theory are secularized theological concepts. Accordingly, this chapter anchors the concept of the nation in the political imaginary of its early modern and medieval theo-political predecessor, the *corpus christianum*. The *corpus christianum* signified the oneness of a sacred interconnectedness of people, territory, and the Christian religion,[6] which was grounded in the transcendental unity of God.[7] The legacy of this oneness is re-enacted in the nation state, in that it binds together people, land, and a common culture. When we discern a continuity between the *corpus christianum* and the *nation* as political imaginaries or anchors of belonging, what emerges is a concept of the nation that is fluid and flexible in its potential to exclude. For it can construct otherness with regard to the people through genealogy, ethnicity and race; land or space through immigration and emigration; as well as culture through religion, social norms, and cultural values. This fluidity may complicate our understanding of the politics of diversity and belonging beyond the binary of civic and ethnic nations.

Whereas the continuity perhaps exists in the interconnectedness of people, land, and culture, there was also a rupture in the relationship between belonging and belief. The political instrumentalization and culturalization of Christian identity served to overcome religious divides that nation states inherited from early modernity: a severing of the unity of belief and belonging. Historically dominant Christian communities understood this rupture as an open attack on Christianity. Many debates about political theology in the nineteenth century were spent on the question of whether or not the nation should be Christian (that is, aligned with a particular confession). This chapter discusses the possibility of the Christian nation based on the theological conflict between the Dutch pastors Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Philippus

5 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 36. See also the introduction to this volume, Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors."

6 See Marietta D. C. van der Tol, "Politics of Religious Diversity: Toleration, Religious Freedom, and Visibility of Religion in Public Space," PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2020.

7 See Lothar Gall and Dirk Blasius, "Einheit," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 2, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett, 1975), 117–152, at 125–126.

Hoedemaker (1839–1910) in the Netherlands. Hoedemaker believed the nation should be Christian (Reformed) while Kuyper argued that the Reformed community needed to fashion itself as one among several minorities. Key in this discussion is the status of the Old Testament and the question of whether or not the state can emulate the Jewish nation.

The rupture and continuity that exist in the relationship between nation and *corpus christianum* presents a profound challenge to the work of political theology: if belief and belonging could be separated, the question of whether or not Christianity *necessarily* constitutes or even co-constitutes culture is at stake. This same question is raised in contemporary right-wing populism, but ambivalently in relation to its normative account of the people.[8] Right-wing populism claims to protect a Christian culture which it minoritizes as threatened by the left and abandoned by the Christian center.[9] Populism accuses liberals of eroding the cultural identity, yet it borrows from classical liberalism its distinction between belief and belonging, and remains largely uninterested in Christian theology. Populism asserts this Christian culture as culturally normative over against religious others, and especially over against Muslims inside and outside the nation.[10] Insofar as Christianity positively informs culture, Christian churches are asked to share the ownership over the meaning of Christianity in society. Can Christian political theology come to terms with this shared ownership in the context of populism, particularly where this ownership is likely to be shared unequally? And is it able to create a different vision? Insofar as Christianity negatively informs populism through axes of internal as well as external othering, can Christian political theology confront the instrumentalization of a culturalized Christian identity in populism?

1 Rupture and Continuity: The Nation and the *Corpus Christianum*

The notion of the nation embodies a rupture insofar as this notion was constitutionally instrumentalized in a post-Revolutionary context in France and beyond. Articulated against absolutism and the inequality, lack of freedom, and legal uncertainty it came to represent, the sovereignty of the people

8 See again Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism," in this volume.

9 See Rogers Brubaker, "Why Populism?," *Theory & Society* 46, no. 5 (2017): 357–385.

10 See Hans-Georg Betz, "Xenophobia, identity politics and exclusionary populism in Europe," *Socialist Register* 39 (2003): 193–210; Ayhan Kaya and Ayşe Tecmen, "Europe versus Islam?: Right-Wing Populist Discourse and the Construction of a Civilisational Identity," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 17, no. 1 (2019): 49–64.

became a powerful political construct in the theorization of the modern state. However, what was "the people"? And who could represent the people? And how did it relate to the notion of the nation?[11]

The notion of the nation is first of all a political imaginary, an image or a metaphor through which to understand the identity of a certain people in a certain place. The nation as a political imaginary attaches a level of normativity to the connection between people, space, and culture.[12] Scholars, such as Adrian Hastings, have suggested that ideas about nationhood originated in the formation of ethnicity in the early modern context: referring to a particular culture of a particular people. According to Hastings, this narrative of oneness alluded to concepts of nationhood in the Old Testament.[13] This might be understood along the lines of 'the nations' in prophetic literature or the idea of the covenanted Jewish nation. However, the concept of the nation did not emerge as part of constitutional theory until the nineteenth century and in Hastings' typology does not explain the normative interconnectedness of people, space, and common culture; neither in the context of the *corpus christianum* nor in the context of the nation state.

The metaphor of the *corpus christianum* signifies an identity that is positively rooted in the figure of Christ and embodied in the church, the body of believers. In medieval and early modern contexts, the *corpus christianum* referred to a oneness of people, land, and an (eschatologically understood) common teleology.[14] Inherent to this identity was a series of otherings, both internal and external.[15] These otherings impacted on foreigners as well as heretics, apostates, Jews, Muslims, and other non-Christians – and this indicates that belief and belonging were clearly intertwined. The imaginary of the *corpus*

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11 This question is taken up by Jonathan Chaplin, "A Political Theology of 'The People': Enlisting Classical Concepts for Contemporary Critique," in this volume.

12 Van der Tol, "Politics of Religious Diversity," 108–109.

13 Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3–4.

14 See Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007); István Bejczy, "Tolerantia: A Medieval Concept," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 3 (1997): 365–384; Enzo Solari, "Contornos de la tolerancia medieval," *Ideas y Valores* 72, no. 153 (2013): 73–97; María J. Roca, "El concepto de tolerancia en el derecho canónico," *Las Canonicum* 41, no. 82 (2001): 455–473.

15 Bejczy, "Tolerantia," 368–369. See also William H. Huseman, "The Expression of the Idea of Toleration in French during the Sixteenth Century," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 3 (1984): 293–310; Julia Costa Lopez, "Beyond Eurocentrism and Orientalism: Revisiting the Othering of Jews and Muslims through Medieval Canon Law," *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 3 (2016): 450–470.

christianum had certain cultural implications: through dissimulation and intolerance, the lesser visibility of these others implied a mitigation of their potential to cultural transcendence.[16] This likely accounts for Christian-specific content to the formation of early modern ethnicities, though the idea of the *corpus* and of ethnicity remain distinct. This imaginary was not only a theological concept, it found expression in law and in international treaties, most poignantly in one of the Westphalian treaties. The Treaty of Osnabrück (1648) between the Holy Roman Empire and Sweden assumes that cities and regions operate as *unum corpus* which, when attached to the Augsburg maxim of *cuius regio eius religio*, again implies a kinship of belief and belonging.[17]

Interestingly, it is only in reference to these smaller and politically autonomous *corpora* that early modern political thought considered the question of whether or not the state might function like covenant Israel in the Old Testament. This is relevant, because it reinforces the significance of the *corpus* imaginary on the level of the state as a normatively distinct political entity. This comes to the fore with regard to the toleration of minorities, to the extent that philosophers who argued for greater tolerance, like Samuel von Pufendorff (1632–1694), rejected the use of Old Testament imaginary with regard to the state. He repudiated the religious exclusivity that emanated from the imaginary of the *corpus christianum*. In his *On the nature and qualification of religion in reference to civil society*, he argued that the Bible offered no grounds for the state to align with the church.[18] Parsing through Old and New Testament political images, like covenant and kingship, he believed that the covenant of God with Israel could not apply to the state or the church.[19] The covenant with Israel was specific in space and the people it addressed, and moreover, a spiritual understanding of regeneration in the New Testament would assume no alliance of the church with space either.[20] This Kingdom of God needed no temporal sovereign or association with a temporal state.[21] Though von Pufendorff was an eminent voice in his own day, this particular argument was more

16 Harald Wydra, *Politics and the Sacred* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 43–49. See also Hubert Knoblauch, "Europe and Invisible Religion," *Social Compass* 50, no. 3 (2003): 267–274, at 269.

17 See Article 5.43, "Treaty of Osnabrück 1648," Article 5.43. The text is available at *Acta Pacis Westphaliae, Supplementa Electronica 1*, http://www.pax-westphalica.de (accessed November 15, 2020).

18 Samuel von Pufendorff, *On the Nature and Qualification of Religion in Reference to Civil Society*, trans. Jodocus Crull, ed. Simone Zurbruchen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 19–25.

19 Von Pufendorff, *On the Nature*, 82.

20 Von Pufendorff, *On the Nature*, 107.

21 See von Pufendorff, *On the Nature*, 55–77, 34–35, 67–68.

or less buried in canons of Christian political thought. However, his ideas set up some of the questions that would reemerge in the conceptualization of the nation, and possibly even the Christian nation: are minorities expected to conform to the religion and culture of the dominant population or can they maintain their distinctiveness in the face of a majority culture? And is it possible for non-conforming people to belong and participate in a common narrative?

2 Kaleidoscopes of Exclusion: The Nation beyond Ethnos and Demos

If the concept of the nation rests on a normative interconnection of people, land, and culture, this implies that the possibilities of othering are more complex than the bifurcation of civic and ethnic nationhood would suggest. All three constituents of the nation are open to interpretation and regulation, and thus can create categories of othering that can coexist more or less incoherently. Internally, the culturalization of religion in emerging nation states alienated communities that relied on particular doctrines, an alternative social hierarchy, or both. This affected Dutch Reformed communities, for example, which had been considered the backbone of Dutch identity for several centuries; confessional schools became subject to restrictive regulations that were sanctioned through criminal law.[22] The culturalization of Protestant religion led to the German *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s, alienating Catholics and Protestants. In France, the culturalization of Catholic identity came with strong anticlericalism and restrictions on processions, which were often labeled as "political."[23] In fact, Catholic processions were heavily regulated in many states, and in the Netherlands even until 1983.

That the triangle of belonging relies on a great extent on othering, rather than on positive descriptions of what the nation is, becomes clear when we consider the position of Jews as well as Muslims. Jewish populations did not automatically gain citizenship, or if they were offered citizenship, this was usually subject to structural economic regulation as well as the condition of loyalty to the state. For example, the Napoleonic decrees concerning Jewish communities restricted their freedoms and effectively demanded acculturation as

22 Until 1848 the law forbade specific religious instruction in schools. Attempts to establish religious schools were met with closure and criminal prosecution of teachers. See Titus M. Gilhuis, *Memorietafel van het Christelijke Onderwijs. De geschiedenis van de schoolstrijd* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1975), 66–72.

23 Paul d'Hollander, "The Church in the Street in Nineteenth-Century France," trans. Carol E. Harrison, *Journal of the Western Society for French History* 32 (2004): 171–194, at 188.

well as assimilation; these decrees remained in place until the end of the nineteenth century.[24] Similarly, French Arabs from post-Napoleonic Egypt suffered ghettoization, persecution, and continuous stigmatization as 'foreign.'[25] Ian Coller understands the contestation of their belonging as a matter of unwillingness as well as inability "to negotiate the realities of diversity and difference on its soil."[26] This reference to soil is important, because the 'civic' designation of French nationhood is theoretically incompatible with this attitude towards both Jews and Muslims.[27]

When the nation state is interpreted in relation to the *corpus christianum*, othering in the nation state might be understood along the lines of people, space, as well as common culture. This triangle can host dimensions of civic and ethnic belonging, without dichotomizing these, and facilitating analytically more complex formations of othering. This triangle also offers the possibility of differentiation between instantiations of othering towards Jews, Catholics, and Muslims in varying contexts, thus allowing an interpretation that is more stratified. For example, the othering of French Arabs in the early nineteenth century is different from the othering of Jews: both were considered foreign, but Arab Muslims were in fact first generation migrants, which many Jews were not. At the same time, their othering occured on the basis of different constructs of foreignness, namely the idea that Jews would be loyal to a transnational Jewish identity, possibly with Zionist inclinations. Their othering is similar, in that they are ethnically not considered to be French, nor are they presumed to belong culturally without a sustained effort to acculturate and assimilate. Though either othering occurs along the lines of people, space, and culture, their othering cannot be seen as identical. The same is true for contemporary migration. The very flexibility and complexity of this othering has some insidious dimensions: in can be employed flexibly towards migrants as well as established ethnic or religious minorities. It calls into question the stability of belonging: when have newcomers done enough to be recognized as fully-fledged members of the political community?

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24 See Michael R. Shurkin, "Consistories and Contradictions: From the Old to the New Regime," *Historical Reflections* 32, no. 1 (2006): 69–70; Jonathan Frankel, "Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?" in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992), 1–37.

25 See Ian Coller, *Arab France. Islam and the Making of Modern Europe 1798–1831* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 51–52, 56, 65, 69, 215.

26 Coller, *Arab France*, vii.

27 Coller, *Arab France*, 33–34, 52.

3 Could the Nation Be Christian?

Considering the rupture from belief and the continuity of axes of othering through the triangle of people, land, and culture, where does the story of Christianity fit in? Could the nation be Christian? At a first glance, this seems little more than rearguard action. However, given the intensity of the nineteenth-century culture wars and the relative strength of Protestant as well as Catholic communities, the culturalization of religion in the context of the nation state was perhaps not inevitable. It certainly was not organic. The projection of the distinction between belief and belonging met with significant resistance within religious communities that had historically been dominant. Importantly, these communities commonly referred to the normative interconnection of people, land, and culture, which for them coincided with a particular church. This connection found expression in the principle of territoriality as well as in confessional statements on the role and calling of the temporal authorities.

Churches shared a connection to land and space through the principle of territoriality, and this is the case in both Protestant and in Catholic thought. Interestingly, church buildings served "as important physical frames of reference" as did their bells: the ringing of the bells reinforced a religious claim on land.[28] More importantly, the principle of territoriality was integral to the religious laws of Roman-Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed churches, which divided the land into parishes. Bernardus Luttikhuis argues that Protestant churches maintained the principle of territoriality partly because of pastoral concerns and partly because these churches lacked the capacity to reimagine the relationship of the church with land and space.[29] None of these churches has since relinquished the principle of territoriality. Theoretically, this means that the concept of the nation emerged as a competitor. For the historically dominant churches, coming to terms with the concept of the nation implied two types of strategies: either to hold on to the idea of a Christian nation or to withdraw into a minority position. In the face of the rise of the nation state and the culturalization of religion, both strategies required the development of new political theologies around belonging.

The tensions that the development of new political theologies of belonging provoked are well exemplified in the theological conflict between Abraham

28 See the discussion of Peter L. Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas in Vyacheslav Karpov, "Desecularisation: A Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 2 (2010): 232–270.

29 See Bernardus A. M. Luttikhuis, *Een grensgeval; oorsprong en functie van het territoriale beginsel in het gereformeerde kerkrecht* (Gorinchem: Narratio, 1992), 264–266.

Kuyper and Philippus Hoedemaker, both important figures in the Dutch Reformed community. The confessional text that was the subject of contention was the status of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, which is shared between European Reformed communities, and which expresses the belief that civil authorities have a specific calling to protect Christianity in society. Adopted in 1561, the charge to 'protect the sacred ministry' implied the normativity of one church and in the context of Reformed Protestantism, referred to the political normativity of the Reformed church. While this article remains part of the official confessions of most of continental Reformed denominations even today, its content became problematic in the context of the nation state.[30] Seemingly unaware of von Pufendorff's work in this area, Kuyper and Hoedemaker explored the relationship between Article 36 and the possibility of a Christian nation in relation to the status of covenant Israel and the political relevance of the Old Testament more generally. This framework creates three possible positions: the nation is Christian; the nation is not Christian, but the church maintains the aspiration of the Christianization of the nation; and relinquishing the idea and ideal of the Christian nation.

Kuyper claimed that Article 36 was a residue of Constantinian Catholicity, arguing that the confession needed to be revised.[31] Like von Pufendorff, he suggested that God had a specific and unalterable covenant with the Jewish nation: the church did not supersede Israel and for this reason, he questioned the relevance of the Old Testament to political theology.[32] This might have passed for theological tweaking, had it not been accompanied by an abundance of antisemitic expressions and the framing of liberalization as a "Judaization" of society.[33] He reiterated his position on the redundancy of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession in various writings on the 'Jewish question.' In these writings, he

30 Anglophone Calvinists removed a similar provision from the Westminster Confession as well as translations of the Belgic Confession. See Jan van Genderen, "Kerk en Confessie," in *Een eeuw christelijk-gereformeerd: aspecten van 100 jaar Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken*, ed. Willem van't Spijker, Jan N. Noorlandt, and Hendrik. van der Schaaf (Kampen: Kok, 1992), 133–148.

31 See Abraham Kuyper, "Calvinism and Confessional Revision," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 2, no. 7 (1891): 369–399; Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinisme en revisie* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1891).

32 See Abraham Kuyper, *Antirevolutionaire Staatkunde. De Beginselen* (Kampen: Kok, 1916), 240, 341–344; Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Stone Lectures* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1898), 107–108; Abraham Kuyper, *Locus de Magistratu* (Kampen: Kok, 1900), 259–261; Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

33 Bart Wallet, "Waarom het antisemitisme uiteindelijk niet aansloeg in de Nederlandse Christelijk-Sociale traditie," *Sophie* 3 (2016): 1–6, at 4–5.

justified his departure from the model of theocracy through a differentiation of nations; in his understanding the Jews remained a separate nation from the Dutch as well as other European nations and he labelled them as 'guests.'[34]

Hoedemaker portrays Kuyper's position thus: Kuyper insisted that theocracy had no legitimate place outside Israel. Kuyper would offer a wrong vision on the nation, a nation that would be "Christian, Protestant, Reformed" (in that order), and limited the relevance of Christianity to the state to cultural characteristics of Christianity.[35] That was not enough for Hoedemaker. Hoedemaker was deeply upset with Kuyper's hermeneutic concerning church and state. In a long tract against Kuyper, he wrote: "It is as if someone commencing an investigation into the history of clothing would say, 'By clothing, I mean a gentleman in a sports coat or suit, or a lady in a ballroom dress or a gown,' in order to avoid any connection to the animal skins in the Garden of Eden."[36] Hoedemaker affirmed the special position of Israel, but he understood the Old and New Testament to exist on a continuum. To him, the nation was Calvinist and he wanted a state church, and a state church that would comprehend everyone.[37] Kuyper and Hoedemaker stood miles apart in this respect too. Hoedemaker's perspective would facilitate the positions that the nation is Christian or that the nation is not Christian, but the church maintains the aspiration of the Christianization of the nation. Hoedemaker's political theology focused on religious unity and conformity, thus rendering a pluralist state impossible. Kuyper, however, represented the position that relinquishes the idea and ideal of the Christian nation and starts building a vision of what it means to be a (significant) minority in the Netherlands. And successfully so, his Anti-Revolutionary Party formed the beginnings of constructive confessional engagement with the nation state.

This engagement was made possible by a relative openness to diversity compared to the theology of Hoedemaker. However, the underpinnings of Kuyper's openness are marred by structural antisemitism. To him, and several of his contemporaries, like the German Adolf Stöcker, the Austrian Karl Lueger, and the French Édouard Drumont, the Jews remain the political 'other.' Stöcker, for example, believed that the Jews remained the 'other,' religiously and ethnically, and in his mind, their presumed inferiority to the Arian Protestant rendered

34 Wallet, "Waarom het antisemitisme uiteindelijk niet aansloeg in the Nederlandse Christelijk-Sociale traditie," 4; see also Philippus J. Hoedemaker, *Article 36 of the Belgic Confession Vindicated against Dr. Abraham Kuyper*, trans. Ruben Alvarado (Aalten: Pantocrator Press, 2019), 63.

35 Hoedemaker, *Article 36 of the Belgic Confession*, 62.

36 Hoedemaker, *Article 36 of the Belgic Confession*, 44.

37 See Hoedemaker, *Article 36 of the Belgic Confession*, 58, 90–91.

them ineligible to full citizenship.[38] Lueger founded the Austrian Christian Social Party, and Drumont led the French Antisemitic League.[39] Each of them was a politically powerful figure: they founded political parties and their antisemitic networks contributed to the spread of antisemitism in Europe. This focus on the alleged incompatibility of Jewish identity and the nation state shows that they were not just concerned with the relationship between belief and belonging, but actually remained interested in the normative connection of people, land, and culture *negatively*. According to Bram Wallet, the absence of a strong national church might explain why Kuyper's influence in Protestant circles did not translate into wide antisemitism in the Netherlands.[40] But even so, these ideas left a mark on the foundations of Christian political theology and their implications for political theology today, and especially for the Christian democratic tradition, remain relatively underexplored.

4 Christianity, Nationalism, and Populism

When populists make 'the people' normative, this pertains to a variation on the normative interconnection of people, land, and culture, which already existed in the imaginary of the nation, and which nation states inherited from the *corpus christianum*. This triangular nature of belonging facilitates a relative fluidity in what it means to belong, both positively and negatively, and is liable to political substantiations which may or may not be enshrined in law. Populism relies heavily on negative conceptions of belonging, oriented at a range of otherings (Muslim, migrant, foreigner, Jew) which are not necessarily grounded in the issue of culture alone. Where Christianity is claimed to legitimize these otherings, it is effectively leveraged on the level of the categories of land and people as well. Conversely, where cultural Christianity is invoked to characterize the nation, this again is leveraged in connection with land and people. This is how it is possible that culture is purported to be sometimes 'Judeo-Christian' against the Muslim migrant and sometimes 'Christian' against Jews. In other

38 D. A. Jeremy Telman, "Adolf Stoecker: Anti-Semite with a Christian Mission," *Jewish History* 9, no. 2 (1995): 93–112, at 96; Caspar C. Aronsfeld, "A German Antisemite in England: Adolf Stöcker's visit to London in 1883," *Jewish Social Studies* 49, no. 1 (1987): 43–52, at 44.

39 Robert S. Wistrich, "Karl Lueger and Ambiguities in Viennese Antisemitism," *Jewish Social Studies* 45, no. 3–4 (1983): 251–262, at 252; Vicki Caron, "Catholic Political Mobilization and Antisemitic Violence in Fin de Siècle France: The Case of the Union Nationale," *The Journal of Modern History* 81 (2009): 294–346, at 298.

40 Wallet, "Waarom het antisemitisme uiteindelijk niet aansloeg in the Nederlandse Christelijk-Sociale traditie," 6.

words, Islamophobia, antisemitism, and xenophobia are not separate issues, but iterations of the same triangle of belonging, leveraged negatively against a range of potential others.

The culturalization of Christianity in the nineteenth century already severed belief and belonging to some extent and this implies that churches already began to share ownership over the meaning of Christianity in society. Therefore, the culturalization of Christianity in populism could be understood in a historical continuum in which the meaning of culture has always been in flux. This cultural Christianity has always had certain discontents and protest against the culturalization of Christian identity has been met with resistance from churches which upheld the ideal of a Christian nation in a confessional sense. Today, populism puts itself forward as a defender of Christianity, but the question is if the discontent that populism expresses is shared with those Christian communities that struggle to make sense of their place in a secularized society—especially as populism shows little interest in the belief side of Christian identity. But the language of 'Christianity' as such has become sufficiently ambivalent to be able to mean either belonging without believing or believing and belonging.

The culturalization of Christian identity is an enormous challenge to Christian political thought and theology. In the face of the continued surge in populism, the question may be asked: At what point does the share in ownership of Christian culture become insignificant? And where does the contribution of the church cease to be distinctive? It seems that negative evaluations of populist invocations of Christianity could be one avenue of engagement: using resources from Scripture, tradition, and reason to contradict the othering that occurs among right-wing populists; perhaps to emphasize the responsibility for the stranger. Some churches do engage in this for example through their involvement in the sanctuary movement and this has had a powerful effect on migration policies in Europe. For example, a Dutch church hosted a family that was threatened with deportation to their home country, even though the children had never been there.[41] This one church was joined by pastors and

41 See Nico de Fijter and Jan Kruidhof, "Kerkasiel in Den Haag houdt ermee op nu Armeens gezin in Nederland kan blijven," *Trouw*, January 30, 2019, https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/kerkasiel-in-den-haag-houdt-ermee-op-nu-armeens-gezin-in-nederland-kan-blijven~b970b411/ (accessed November 20, 2020); Navin Bhagwat, "Kerkasiel afgesloten met een lach," *AD*, January 31, 2019, https://www.ad.nl/den-haag/kerkasiel-afgesloten-met-een-lach~a773edb6/ (accessed November 20, 2020); and, in English, Patrick Kingsley, "96 Days Later, Nonstop Church Service to Protect Refugees Finally Ends," *The New York Times*, January 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/30/world/europe/netherlands-church-vigil-refugees.html (accessed November 20, 2020).

members of various denominations all across the country, and their advocacy for children's rights in the context of migration led to a revision of the policy regarding the deportation of minors.

Interestingly, this sanctuary movement appears to be a protest movement in which the church chooses to be the state's other. This posture of protest seems to fit in a narrative in which religion, Christianity, or the church, operate as minorities. Unwittingly, churches may actually play into the majority-minority binary that was inherent to belonging in early modernity. And yet, this posture of protest coexists, at least in countries like Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, with collaborations between state and churches on issues pertaining to the common good, for example in poverty relief, community work, and social justice. Churches can actually receive subsidies to this end. How does political theology hold these things together? The short answer is perhaps that it does not hold these things together, but that either attitudes of collaboration and protest emerge in particular contexts and over particular issues.

In order to counterbalance the discontent of populism, with which some Christians seem to resonate, Christian political theology needs to provide a vision of what it means to be significant to culture in a *positive* sense: holding together believing and belonging in the church's engagement with culture, without claiming an exclusive cultural normativity and while resisting self-minoritization through the language of counter-culturalism and withdrawal. The opportunity to transcend culture is open to all faiths, and this implies a possibility to reclaim a measure of ownership over the culture in which churches operate. The relative openness of culture permits these dynamics. This positive engagement could not only undermine the discontent that populism has sought to leverage politically, it facilitates real contributions of churches to society. Many churches are already making such contributions to society. What political theology can contribute to Christianity in the 'secularized' West is a systematic framework that helps churches that already engage socially to anchor this engagement theologically.

CHAPTER 5

America Transcendent

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd

> The concept of religion which has served Christianity well cannot remain the stable, much less the privileged, lens through which we examine Christianity "itself."[1]

In *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*, labor historian Bethany Moreton describes what she calls the "Wal-Mart model" of Christian free enterprise.[2] The Wal-Mart model combines American religion, nationalism, and capitalism in a heady combination that taps into a deep reservoir of need, hope, faith, trust, and anxiety in the American communities in which it has taken root. It has been, and continues to be, a resounding success. For many Americans the story of Wal-Mart's commercial success is deeply familiar, so much so that it can be difficult to step back and see a bigger picture.

This chapter explores this picture.[3] The Wal-Mart model illustrates how American nationalism, populism, capitalism, and religion intermingle to contribute to a particular form of U.S. exceptionalism.[4] It is not only Wal-Mart, of course, and the chapter also discusses an Iowa prison faith ministry and

1 Gil Anidjar, "Christianity, Christianities, Christian," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 1, no. 1 (2015): 39–46, at 42.

2 Moreton's analysis of the gendered implications of the Wal-Mart model is particularly strong. She also perceptively describes Wal-Mart's foray into Latin America in the heady post-Cold War 1990s, its executives emboldened by "a fertile cross-pollination of military, commercial, and evangelical interests in US foreign policy." Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 178–179.

3 An earlier version of this chapter appeared in *Theologies of American Exceptionalism*, ed. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020).

4 I share Rogers Brubaker's skepticism of any "attempt to 'purify' the concept of populism by defining it as analytically entirely independent of nationalism." As he writes, "populist discourse *already* appeals to the people as plebs or 'ordinary people', vis-à-vis those on top (and sometimes also those on the bottom); to the people as sovereign demos, vis-à-vis those who actually exercise power; and to the people as bounded community, differing not only in national terms from foreigners, but also, in cultural and moral terms, from those on the top, those on the bottom and those on the margins." Rogers Brubaker, "Populism and Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 44–66, at 45, 61.

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rehabilitation program called 'InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI)' discussed by law and religion scholar Winnifred Sullivan in *Prison Religion*, and the concept of American 'techno-optimism' as a response to the climate crisis as described by religion scholar Lisa Sideris.[5] I am interested in the capacity of all of these political theologies, like the American project itself, to transcend contemporary understandings of both 'politics' and 'religion.'

In a recent article Rogers Brubaker described populism and nationalism "as interpenetrating or even mutually constitutive," with a nod to "the populist or demotic dimension of some nationalisms and the nationalist dimension of many populisms."[6] Political theology, however, makes no appearance in his discussion. This volume addresses this missing piece. As Vincent Lloyd observes, and as quoted in the editor's introduction, "the best work in political theology has an impulse to use the conjunction of the two, the political and the theological, to explore the difficulties involved in each."[7] The American political theologies examined in this chapter express a populist impulse insofar as they mobilize "people talk" that is, as Brubaker notes, "rhetorically powerful and pragmatically effective."[8] They confound, and at times transcend, modern distinctions between the political and the religious. They embody a cosmic optimism and concept of newness that is invested with spiritual meaning.[9] They reflect and reinforce what legal theorist Jothie Rajah refers to as "an affective conviction in the United States as transcendent."[10] As Rajah astutely observes, "a paradox marks the narrative of law, nation, and authority in the specific instance of the United States. While … law and nation refer to each other and find authority in each other, there is a subversion of secular modernity in one crucial respect: the narrative of law, nation, and authority constructs the United States as itself transcendent."[11] The notion of America transcendent resonates in and through various strands of U.S. nationalism and populism. It

5 See Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart;* Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Lisa H. Sideris, "American Techno-Optimism," in *Theologies of American Exceptionalism*.

6 Brubaker, "Populism and Nationalism," 49.

7 Vincent Lloyd, "Introduction," in *Race and Political Theology*, ed. Vincent Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 1–20, at 6. See also Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

8 Brubaker, "Populism and Nationalism," 58.

9 Sacvan Bercovitch, "The Winthrop Variation: A Model of American Identity," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 97 (1998): 75–94, at 94. See also Constance Furey, "Familiar Commerce and Covenantal Love," in *Theologies of American Exceptionalism*.

10 Jothie Rajah, "Sinister Translations: Law's Authority in a Post-9/11 World," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* Vol. 21, no. 1 (2014): 107–143, at 137–138.

11 Rajah, "Sinister Translations," 125.

is both religious and secular. It is understood to transcend politics. It reflects a ritualistic vision of community grounded in what Nadia Marzouki describes as "a mimicry of feelings and ways of life."[12] This is the context in which the Wal-Mart model, like IFI and techno-optimism, appear natural and universalizable.

1 Religious and Secular: The Productive Ambiguity of Protestant Christianity

To begin it is helpful to bracket separationist understandings of Christianity: that is, the idea that American Christianity sits in one domain and American law, public policy, and foreign policy in another.[13] Noone conveys the productive ambiguity of protestant Christianity and its significance for American law and public life more compellingly than Winnifred Fallers Sullivan. When I first read *To Serve God & Wal-Mart*, I had just taught Sullivan's important and challenging book *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution*, in which she reflects on her experience serving as an expert witness for the plaintiffs in a legal challenge to an Iowa prison ministry program called InnerChange Freedom Initiative. Sullivan's even-handed description of the defense's argument is especially noteworthy; as she explains, the defense found themselves "caught between on the one hand assertions that IFI is successful because it is religious, and that PFM and IFI have equal rights as religious organizations to contract with government; and on the other, that IFI is essentially secular and provides a treatment program that is virtually identical with the secular classes offered through the Iowa DOC."[14] Wrestling with the legal implications of IFI's ambivalently religious and secular status leads her to conclude that "religious ideas, institutions, and identities have led to division and have limited our understanding of human nature, but the persistence of religion also locates a universal aspect of human life, one that extends across phenomena

12 "To invoke affective feelings is to propose a ritualist vision of the community, one founded on a mimicry of feelings and ways of life" writes Nadia Marzouki in *Islam: An American Religion*, trans. C. Jon Delogu (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 26–27. Examining controversies around Islam in the U.S. and Europe, Marzouki concludes that the real story is not about "Islam" but rather liberal secularism's "confrontation with itself," and in particular the depoliticization that follows a retrenchment of liberal legalism in the face of affective commitments that are not—or not only—about Islam but reflect the weaknesses and limits of liberal secular democracy itself (Marzouki, *Islam*, 33–34).

13 There is a remarkable degree of certainty in American public and political discourse concerning what is (or is not) Christian. Stephen K. Green historicizes this misplaced sense of certainty in *Inventing a Christian America: The Myth of the Religious Founding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

14 Sullivan, *Prison Religion*, 209.

that are now legally divided between the religious and the secular."[15] It follows, Sullivan concludes in what is perhaps the most important passage of the book, that "legal disestablishment of such religion … does not seem possible without a degree of control that law cannot achieve."[16]

In reading Moreton I was struck by the extent to which Sullivan's nuanced account of the impossibility of legal disestablishment in the United States also clarifies Wal-Mart's capacity to be both religious and not religious simultaneously, not unlike IFI.[17] This, perhaps, marks both Wal-Mart and IFI as so quintessentially American. Reading Moreton and Sullivan together underscores the productive ambiguity that surrounds protestant Christianity in the American context: that is, its capacity both to be and not to be a 'religion' simultaneously.[18] While this ambiguity threads quietly through Moreton's text it is obscured by her use of the modifier Christian in the term 'Christian free enterprise.' Is Wal-Mart Christian? What does that mean? Could it be Christian and non-Christian? Religious and secular? Is it be possible to think beyond these categories?

Gil Anidjar makes a convincing case that it is. He draws our attention away from the academic destabilization of religion and toward the site from which the concept itself was established:

> The limits of 'the religious' (to be distinguished from 'the ethical' or 'the aesthetic') have become more fluid, even porous, most visibly perhaps in relation to 'the political' but beyond it as well. Equally significant, however, is the fact that the very site (in the ethnographic sense of the term) where the concept of religion was established and elaborated, from which it was disseminated, has remained largely and oddly immune to these developments. How to think of such a site? How to call it, even? Is it the Christian West? Judeo-Christian civilization? Is it modern Europe? Be that name what it may, how to understand its referent? If we grant it a measure of integrity (and that is a big if), will it be primarily religious? Will it be political, cultural, geographical, economic, or all of the above?[19]

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15 Sullivan, *Prison Religion*, 154.

16 Sullivan, *Prison Religion*, 179, concluding that "if disestablished religion cannot be separated from public life because it is intrinsic to the nature of and dependent on the voluntary assent of the individual human, and efforts to do so are quixotic at best, then the appropriate way to address social issues must be debated in terms of the issues themselves, not on the grounds of whether their solutions can or cannot be denominated as religious."

17 Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart.*

18 See *At Home and Abroad: The Politics of American Religion*, ed. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd and Winnifred Fallers Sullivan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

19 Anidjar, "Christianity, Christianities, Christian," 40.

This requires interrogating our understanding of Christianity as (merely) a religion:

> Everything is therefore as if the interrogation of the concept of religion did not unsettle our understanding of Christianity as a religion. A strange essentialism. For what if Christianity were not a religion? Not exclusively so? What if, for two thousand years, it had been more than a religion? Or something else altogether? Christianity only became a religion (in the restricted, modern sense) latterly. Having learned what we could from and about the concept of religion—its novelty, its questionable disappearance, its containment—it may be necessary to reconsider what we mean by Christianity.[20]

Anidjar is right. It is a strange essentialism that allows us to interrogate the concept of religion without unsettling our understanding of Christianity. Doing so along the lines proposed by Anidjar, Sullivan, and others allows us to perceive the shape-shifting capacity of U.S. protestant Christianity to be and also not be a religion, including in its varied expressions in the Wal-Mart model, IFI, and other locations. These spiritual economies exemplify clearly what Anidjar describes as actually existing Christianities as opposed to Christianity understood more narrowly as one religion among others:

> Rather than conceive of Christianity as one religion among others, rather than presume that it belongs to the limited realm of the religious (to be distinguished from the aesthetic and the legal, the political and the scientific, say), one might shift perspective and explore the possibility that Christianity, 'actually existing Christianity,' is a specific series of agencements, a multifarious, distributive order (or series thereof) that divides between certain realms (the theological from the political, to invoke again this familiar paradigm), at times creating them out of (almost) nothing, at times unifying those realms and arranging them after a fashion, after a number of fashions.[21]

We might consider the Wal-Mart model as a series of *agencements* in this sense. It is a multifarious, distributive order that simultaneously divides certain realms (the religious from the commercial or political) and unifies them, arranging them after a certain fashion. The same holds for IFI, and, one could argue, for the American project as a whole.

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20 Anidjar, "Christianity, Christianities, Christian," 41.

21 Anidjar, "Christianity, Christianities, Christian," 42.

2 Scriptural and Universal, but Not Religious

Asked at a prayer breakfast whether Wal-Mart was a Christian company, former Wal-Mart executive Don Soderquist replied, "No, but the basis of our decisions was the values of Scripture."[22] Like Soderquist, most Americans do not see Wal-Mart as Christian or even as religious, but as non-sectarian. Like the United States, Wal-Mart rises above the particularity of religion. It transcends it. This positioning both distinguishes and naturalizes protestant Christianity. "Protestantism in its various forms," Sullivan and I have suggested elsewhere, "can choose to appear not as a religion but rather as the natural antinomian evangelical essence of America—having gotten rid of all that 'religion' stuff, facilitating polemics against heathens, Communists, Mormons, Catholics, Muslims, and so on."[23] Don Soderquist's response reflects this understanding. For Soderquist, as for many other Americans, it is possible to base one's actions on scriptural values that happen to be American, and potentially universal, without necessarily being religious.

This simultaneous distinguishing and naturalization of American Protestanism threads through Wal-Mart's corporate ethnography. Wal-Mart truly both is and is not religious. In fact, contrary to popular perception, as Moreton herself notes, "for most of its life the company did not lay any claim to a Christian identity."[24] Sam Walton and his wife Helen were liberal Presbyterians who supported the local offices of Planned Parenthood in Bentonville, Arkansas—Wal-Mart's headquarters. In 1989, Helen Walton was elected as a trustee of the Presbyterian Church Foundation, where she established the Sam and Helen Walton Awards for church development, with a $6 million gift. As Moreton explains, "Wal-Mart transformed itself into a national Christian icon from the bottom up," with its corporate identity shaped by employees and consumers.[25] "Far from building on or actively manipulating an unbroken Southern heritage of old-time religion, official Wal-Mart came rather late to appreciate its employees' and customers spiritual priorities."[26]

Claims to freedom, spirituality, and universality, without, necessarily, religion, also characterize the InnerChange Freedom Initiative, an Iowa prison faith ministry and rehabilitation program at the center of Sullivan's *Prison Religion*. Like Soderquist's Wal-Mart, IFI's proponents understand their program's

22 Moreton, *To Serve God & Wal-Mart*, 89.

23 Winnifred Fallers Sullivan and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "Theologies of American exceptionalism: Introduction," *The Immanent Frame*, February 13, 2017, https://tif.ssrc.org/2017/02/13/american-exceptionalism-introduction/ (accessed November 15, 2020).

24 Moreton, *To Serve God & Wal-Mart*, 122.

25 Moreton, *To Serve God & Wal-Mart*, 122.

26 Moreton, *To Serve God & Wal-Mart*, 122.

values to be scriptural and universal but not necessarily religious. These include an emphasis on freedom, morality, choice, and service to community, family, and nation. For IFI's purposes, whether or not these values are understood as 'religious' is beside the point; it is seen as an irritating distraction orchestrated by reactionary secularist opponents of a non-impositional, non-sectarian, and ultimately emancipatory intervention. The program's moral and spiritual success, also echoing the Wal-Mart model, is understood as the product of free will and the natural outcome of a free religious and economic marketplace. Inmates (and customers) make a series of unencumbered individual choices. No one is forced to join. No one is forced to shop. These choices emerge naturally and without coercion when barriers to freedom are lifted, and possibilities for material and moral improvement are allowed to flourish uninhibited by heavy-handed government interference and regulation.

Prison Religion powerfully illustates the stakes of interrogating understandings of Christianity as 'merely' a religion.[27] Relying on legal ethnography and a keen sense of the limits of law, and of equal importance, without demonizing either 'side,' Sullivan delineates the legal and sociological implications of this Janus-faced capacity of American Protestantism to be both a religion and not a religion. Rather than celebrate or condemn, she observes that IFI's success may be attributed to American Protestantism's unique capacity to shape-shift and be not a religion, legally, but rather a universal system of values. The capacity to rise above the fray and stake a claim to neutrality and universality allows IFI's theology to migrate, though ambivalently and never completely, from the realm of 'religion' to that of universal values. This fluid and fluctuating aspect of the phenomenology of American exceptionalism enables particular religio-political forms to occupy the "unmarked positions that resonate with religion and history of the majority."[28]

A third spiritual economy that resonates with these themes is the American response to environmental degradation and limitation. Lisa Sideris uses the term "techno-optimism" to describe this response.[29] Techno-optimism brings together an abiding suspicion of state interference, faith in private markets

27 Other scholars are pursuing related lines of inquiry with regard to other 'world religions;' Brannon Ingram is working on the political and religious implications of the English translation of the Arabic term *din* as 'religion.' Brannon Ingram, "Is Islam a 'Religion'? Contesting *Din*-Religion Equivalence in Twentieth Century Islamist Discourse," in *Words of Experience: Translating Islam with Carl W. Ernst,* ed. Brannon Wheeler and Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst (Sheffield: Equinox, 2020), 19–40.

28 Sullivan, *Prison Religion*, 179. See also Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Church State Corporation: Construing Religion in US Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

29 Sideris, "American Techno-Optimism."

and the individual, and unwavering confidence in the potential for unceasing technological innovation and universalization. Techno-optimist ecomodernists see themselves as de facto planetary managers, supporting geoengineering rather than reduced emissions, and calling for innovations to reduce the symptoms of obesity rather than limiting food intake. Faced with the climate crisis, American techno-optimists embrace a philosophy of excess, adaptation, and anti-statism. Their faith in science and technology, according to Sideris, exhibits a religiosity of its own which operates at the expense of the natural world and nonhuman life. She cites ecomodernist and tech visionary Stewart Brand, who famously quipped that "we are as gods and we have to get good at it."[30]

The Wal-Mart model, IFI, and American techno-optimism present themselves as embodying the definition of freedom and the essence of America. While it may be tempting to dismiss these ways of thinking as naïve, backward, or misguided, it would be a mistake. These are powerful discourses. Like the idea of America itself, the Wal-Mart model, the prison ministry, and techno-optimist responses to climate crisis all traffic in a capacity to transcend both politics and religion. Each embodies a set of collective aspirations that are understood to be accessible and desirable for all, whether one identifies as Christian or nonbeliever; American or not-yet American; domestic or not-yet domesticated. There is room for everyone. All are invited. There is a populist impulse. Wal-Mart's ambivalently Christian free enterprise model, IFI's spiritual rehabilitation program, and Americans' techno-scientific optimism reflect the possibility of an America transcendent. This is a nationalist and populist project even as it is also a religious one. It also travels.

3 America Transcendent, Abroad

U.S. *churchstateness*, or the American way of doing religion-things at home, is understood to be free, voluntary, and disestablished.[31] That is not the case when it comes to foreign formations of *churchstateness*. At home, we have

30 Sideris, "American Techno-Optimism."

31 Paul Johnson, Pamela Klassen, and, Winnifred Sullivan coined the term *churchstateness* to capture enmeshed and intercalibrated forms of church and state in the Americas. As they explain: "'The state' has been often described and theorized, but 'the church' less so, at least beyond ecclesiastical contexts too indebted perhaps to its sense as given. The phenomenon of their often enmeshed and intercalibrated forms—a crossed and intertextual *churchstateness*—requires more detached and empirically grounded description and conceptualization." Paul Christopher Johnson, Pamela E. Klassen, and Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Ekklesia: Three Inquiries in Church and State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 2.

freedom; abroad they have varying degrees of establishment. From this perspective, exporting American churchstateness ('religious freedom') appears to be non-impositional and benevolent. It would be selfish not to share the good news.[32]

Indeed, since the founding the U.S. has sought to convert others to American ways of being human, understood simultaneously in religious and non-religious terms. The U.S. sought to transform societies in the Philippines and Haiti in the early twentieth century, Japan, Germany, and Iran in the mid-twentieth century, Iraq and Afghanistan in the early twenty-first, and Myanmar, Venezuela, and Iran today. Moreton's book describes the projection of a triumphalist form of U.S. global power in the heady post-Cold War 1990s, including but not limited to Wal-Mart, as markets and missions thrived in a renewed field of global possibility. More recently, international aid agencies, non-governmental organizations, and foreign investors refer to "the Myanmar account" as a "frontier market" and "hot spot."[33]

During the American occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), as described by historian Kate Ramsey, U.S. authorities drew a close association between Haitian "sorcery," and popular insurgency. Laws against *les sortilèges* ('spells'), understood to prohibit vodou, were enforced in the name of establishing moral decency and consolidating American control of the island. These objectives were understood to go together. In Haiti and in other imperial contexts, American attempts to enforce moral decency (and repress vodou, Catholicism, and other dissenting beliefs and practices) were not understood to involve the export or establishment of 'religion' but rather the promotion of universal values, a free market, modern scientism, public health, secular marriage and gender conventions, the rule of law, and religious freedom. This is part of a larger global story involving the co-constitution of modern ideals of political subjectivity, citizenship, civil religion, and proper nationhood. In his work on spiritism in Brazil, for example, Paul Johnson has described the purification

32 Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); *Politics of Religious Freedom*, ed. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Saba Mahmood, and Peter G. Danchin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Faking Liberties: Religious Freedom in American-Occupied Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (Durham, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Anna Su, *Exporting Freedom: Religious Liberty and American Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

33 Matthew Kennard and Claire Provost. "How Aid Became Big Business," *LA Review of Books*, May 8, 2016, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/aid-became-big-business/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

of the mid-seventeenth century category of religion, "a properly civil religion," as it occurred in dialogue with (and opposition to) a "protoanthropological notion of spirit possession as civil danger."[34]

Protestant forms play a complex and fluctuating role in this American imperial project. Protestantism is a religion that may be freely chosen, an implicit set of (secular) standards and civilized values, and the horizon against which racialized and subjugated practices are classified as religious, superstitious, or political to be regulated and, at times, criminalized.[35] Anti-superstition campaigns against vodou in Haiti targeting materialism and paganism also targeted Catholicism. Protestantism was not understood as a religion in those campaigns but as the implicit (white) normative backdrop against which others were deemed to be modern or un-modern. Haitians and Filipinos under U.S. rule in the early twentieth-century were not seen as foreigners but as uncivilized, primitive, superstitious, quasi-liminal subjects.[36] Other similarly unstably categorized subjects of U.S. rule, such as Puerto Ricans, for example, were deemed not-quite American, or as the Supreme Court famously phrased it, "foreign in a domestic sense."[37]

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34 Paul Christopher Johnson, "An Atlantic Genealogy of 'Spirit Possession,'" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53, no. 2 (2011): 393–425, at 398. Johnson examines transnational genealogies of the category of spirit possession, tracking the implications for Brazilian 'religion,' and showing how the Penal Code of 1890 came to regulate 'spiritism' and 'magic' under the rubric of public health. "When the 1891 Brazilian Constitution declared the freedom of religion, for example, it was already obvious that the article would not include Afro-Brazilian Candomblé under its protections. The reason it was obvious was that Candomblé and other possession religions had already been subordinated to the Penal Code of 1890, which regulated 'spiritism' and 'magic' in the name of 'public health.' Managing African and other deviant religions after abolition required a re-imagining of the nation, its religious profile, its proxemic rules, and its regulatory style" (Johnson, "An Atlantic Genealogy of 'Spirit Possession'," 413).

35 On the religion-politics-superstition trinary see Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

36 Jeffrey Wheatley, "U.S. Colonial Governance of Superstition and Fanaticism in the Philippines," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 30, no. 2 (2018): 1–16 and Jeffrey Wheatley, "Policing Fanaticism, Religion, and Race in the American Empire, 1830–1930," PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2020). On the politics of religion in the U.S. occupation of Japan see Thomas, *Faking Liberties*.

37 *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion and the Constitution*, ed. Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006). See also David Maldonado Rivera, "'A Perfect, Irrevocable Gift': Recognizing the Proprietary Church in Puerto Rico, 1898–1908," in *At Home and Abroad: The Politics of American Religion,* eds. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd and Winnifred Fallers Sullivan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 37–50.

Even the division between 'domestic' and 'foreign' in the U.S. is in part a product of this imperial history.[38] In the Insular Cases, a series of Supreme Court rulings in 1901 involving the status of the inhabitants of the U.S. territories of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam, all acquired in the Spanish-American War, the Court had to decide whether constitutional rights applied to individuals in these territories. It held that full constitutional protection of rights does *not* automatically extend (*ex proprio vigore*—of its own force) to all territories under U.S. control. These cases helped to extend and cement a racialized and religionized legal gradient of U.S. citizenship into the twentieth century,[39] upending the illusion of a clean domestic/foreign distinction, dividing governed populations on civilizational terms, and cementing racial and religious hierarchies that have been mapped onto degrees of American-ness. The persistence and power of these gradients is reflected in contemporary immigration restrictions and 'countering violent extremism' programs, police abuse and murder of innocent African Americans and other people of color, the ongoing usurpation of Native American land and lifeways, and the dilatory U.S. government response to post-hurricane relief in Puerto Rico.[40]

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38 It is partly for this reason that Paul Kramer wants to discard the terms domestic and foreign "as actors' categories forged in struggles over space, sovereignty, and boundary-making, the work of cartographers and border guards, the tremendous power of which can only be apprehended if they are discarded as terms of art." Blurring the domestic-foreign allows for subtle distinctions to emerge at the edges of categories like "citizen," as when Kramer describes "distinctions among populations that lend shape to its vertical gradations of sovereignty" or when Michael Graziano, writing on U.S. racial hierarchies, refers to imaginaries of U.S. citizenship that rely on a racialized legal gradient rather than a citizen/non-citizen binary. Paul A. Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910," *Journal of American History* 88, no. 4 (2002): 1315–1353, at 1357, 1350; Michael Graziano, "Race, the Law, and Religion in America." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (September 2017): 1–30.

39 Graziano describes the reimagining of U.S. citizenship as a legal gradient by those who opposed the Fourteenth Amendment such that the classification 'citizen' was applied to African Americans without imbuing them with the legal or theological protections afforded their white counterparts. "American ideas about race and theology produced a racialized vision of citizenship as a gradient in which some citizens could exercise more religious freedom than others." Graziano, "Race, the Law, and Religion in America," 9–11.

40 Spencer Dew, "Have it your way: Puerto Rico and the Myth of American Freedom," *The Immanent Frame*, November 15, 2017, https://tif.ssrc.org/2017/11/15/have-it-your-way-puerto-rico-and-the-myth-of-american-freedom/ (accessed August 5, 2020). Racialized gradients also shape the production of academic knowledge; as David Chidester argues, "the enduring opposition between the primitive and the civilized structured the birth of religious studies in America…in the US, this division of labor in dealing with internally colonized people was crucial to the birth of an academic field of inquiry that was distinct from but located within the European empire of religion." David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 290.

4 Conclusion: The America-Game

The Wal-Mart model of Christian free enterprise, the InnerChange Freedom Initiative, and American techno-optimism have the capacity to transcend religion and politics. Like the American national project itself, any exclusivity attributed to them is not seen as inherent but as something that others bring to their reading of them.[41] These populist political theologies embody a cosmic optimism, philosophy of excess, and concept of newness invested with spiritual meaning that resonate with what Sacvan Bercovitch famously described as the "America-game:"

> The City on a Hill is the first ideal to take the fate of the New World as its condition of failure and success. And it is the first New World ideal to invest the very concept of newness with spiritual meaning grounded in a specific, then-emergent, now-dominant way of life. In that double thrust of Winthrop's image lies the explanation—the how and the why—for its continuing usefulness to the culture. As a rhetorical figure, it derives from two traditions that proved inadequate as the ideological framework for modern nationalisms: kingship and Christianity. Winthrop varied both those traditions to accommodate a modern venture, and in the course of variation he opened the prospect for something new under the sun, the America-game.[42]

IFI, the Wal-Mart model, and American techno-optimism are not, or not only, Christian (read: exclusive or sectarian) enterprises. They exist in a state of ambivalence with regard to their religious and secular conditions of possibility. They evoke and they efface. Resonating in contemporary forms of American populism, they are formed by the American experiment and are engaged in reinventing it.[43] Transcending 'politics' and 'religion,' they reach toward an America transcendent.

41 Sullivan, *Prison Religion*, 155.

42 Sacvan Bercovitch, "The Winthrop Variation," 94. See also Constance Furey, "Familiar Commerce and Covenantal Love," in *Theologies of American Exceptionalism*.

43 Sullivan, *Prison Religion*, 153.

PART 2

Readings

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CHAPTER 6

Sacred Scripts of Populism: Scripture-Practices in the European Far Right

Hannah M. Strømmen

Populism has been called the ghost haunting Europe.[1] But if populism is a ghost, it has taken quite concrete forms over the years. These forms are crucial to examine in order to pinpoint not only the style or spirit of populism, but the 'doing' of populism. In this chapter, I examine the way far-right populism is done with texts, specifically the sacred scriptures of Muslims and Christians. I focus on examples from Western Europe. Western Europe is a context where scriptural references would perhaps not be expected in the political sphere due to higher levels of secularization than, for instance, Eastern Europe. But populist scripture-practices are present and significant in this context and therefore need to be examined more closely.

The recent success of the term 'populism' in Europe is connected to a growing phenomenon on the far right, associated with the rise of figures such as Jean-Marie Le Pen (National Front), Jörg Haider (Austrian Freedom Party), and Umberto Bossi (Northern League).[2] Far-right populism is a heterogeneous phenomenon. It is a political spectrum on which democratically elected parties, street movements, and terrorists can be plotted. Despite this heterogeneity, I argue that it is possible to discern patterns of relating to texts—specifically to scripture—that could be deemed 'populist,' particularly in far-right claims to Christianity and demonizations of Islam. The interdependence of far-right movements is important to note across countries, in "the transnational power of ideas and their diffusion, the role of similarities in cross-national historical legacies, or the building of action networks across national or regional borders."[3] Pointing out patterns of scripture-practice is promising because it demonstrates the way different incarnations of the far right utilize shared

1 Gabriella Lazaridis, Giovanna Campani, and Anne Benveniste, "Introduction," in *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and "Othering,"* ed. Gabriella Lazaridis, Giovanna Campani, and Anne Benveniste (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1–23, at 2.

2 Lazaridis, Campani, and Benveniste, "Introduction," 3–4.

3 Michael Minkenberg, Mats Deland, and Christin Mays, "Introduction," in *In the Tracks of Breivik: Far Right Networks in Northern and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mats Deland, Michael Minkenberg, and Christin Mays (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2013), 9–18, at 14.

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strategies. How might a 'people' be appealed to in the celebration of the Bible or the desecration of a Qur'an? How might so-called elites be spurned by Bibles being claimed and Qur'ans disclaimed? How is an enemy invoked through the use of sacred scriptures?

My focus in this chapter will be on the Bible, but in many ways, it is impossible to separate far-right uses of the Bible from the desecrations of Qur'ans as well as from less violent but nonetheless antagonistic interpretations of the Qur'an. I argue that there are three main traits to populist scripture practices: the shoring up of the 'enemy,' the reinforcement of us and them into different 'scripture-cultures,' and a focus on scriptures as symbols and material artefacts rather than as texts to be read and interpreted. I conclude by reflecting on what biblical studies can learn from studies of populism and vice versa, pointing to the need for what I call 'political scripture research' and 'lived scripture.'

1 Populist Scripture-Practices

There is no neat catch-all definition for the far right or for populism. But as a transnational phenomenon in Europe, far-right ideology normally encompasses notions of inequality and hierarchy in designating 'insiders' and 'outsiders'; ethnic forms of nationalism linked to a mono-racial community; and calls to defend the imagined community.[4] As David Art puts it, the "emerging party family" that falls variously under the categories extreme-right, right-wing populist or radical right, appeal to nationalist sentiments, as well as to racial stereotypes and xenophobia.[5] "Although mainstream parties throughout Europe have often done this as well, far right parties have made draconian immigration policies central to their program and engaged regularly in a radically xenophobic political discourse."[6] Although definitions of populism are contested, the general contours of populism are recognized broadly, in the exaltation of, and appeal to 'the people.'[7] A homogenous 'good' people is suffering due to the actions, from above, by elites and, from below, by a variety

4 Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin, and Brian Jenkins, *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe* (London/New York: Routledge, 2012), 5.

5 David Art, "Memory Politics in Western Europe," in *The Extreme Right in Europe: Current Trends and Perspectives*, ed. Uwe Backes and Patrick Moreau (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 359–381, at 360.

6 Art, "Memory Politics in Western Europe," 360.

7 Nadia Marzouki and Duncan McDonnell, "Populism and Religion," in *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy (London: Hurst & Co, 2016), 1–11, at 3.

of others.[8] "Populists express strong moral judgements in decrying this state of affairs, portraying society as divided into a good 'us' and a bad (even evil) 'them.'"[9] In the last decades, the bad 'them' has increasingly been identified with Muslims. Not all far-right movements are populist and not all populists are far-right. The feature of the far-right spectrum I focus on in this chapter is the anti-Islam strain that repeats itself from democratic populist right-wing parties such as the Norwegian *Fremskrittspartiet*, far-right organizations such as 'Stop the Islamization of Norway,' to far-right terrorists such as Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway on 22 July 2011 – to take examples from Norway. Of course, these three examples are neither 'far right' in the same way nor 'populist' in the same way. But they all perceive Islam as a threat and play into the 'othering' of Muslims from conceptions of a good and innocent people.

While nationalist politics is key, calls to defend a European people are almost equally loud in populist far-right rhetoric. As Olivier Roy has pointed out, what contemporary far-right parties across Europe seemingly share is an anti-Muslim stance, frequently propped up by a defense of Christian identity and culture. Countries such as the UK, France, the Netherlands, and Germany are frequently seen as the most secular in Europe. But the increased confidence with which the Christian identity of European nations, and of Europe as a whole, is proclaimed, is striking. The script runs: political and cultural elites across Europe are harming the people by allowing for an aggressive form of Islamization that is eroding the Christian values of the people. The French National Rally (previously *Front National*), the Dutch Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*), the Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*), the Italian League (*Lega*, or *Lega Nord*), the Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*), and the United Kingdom Independence Party "have all claimed that the Christian identity of European nations is being threatened by a potentially deadly combination of pro-globalisation national/supranational liberal elites on the one hand, and, on the other, by an aggressive process of Islamisation."[10] In a speech in Rome in March 2011, the leader of the Dutch Freedom Party, Geert Wilders spoke of immigration as a dangerous threat to the West. Appealing to a common European culture, he stated that the West

8 Marzouki and McDonnell, "Populism and Religion", 2.

9 Marzouki and McDonnell, "Populism and Religion", 2.

10 Olivier Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," in *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, eds. Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell and Olivier Roy (London: Hurst & Co, 2016), 185–201, at 186.

shares the same Judeo-Christian culture and that this culture is superior to Islamic culture.[11]

In the same year as Wilders' speech about defending a so-called superior Judeo-Christian culture, Breivik blew up the Government quarter in Oslo and massacred young people at a political summer camp on the island of Utøya in Norway because he designated them as complicit in the "Islamization" of Europe—and a threat to the "native" people of Christian Europe.[12] While Breivik has been called a 'lone wolf,' scholars such as Ralf Wiederer have examined the way far-right networks on the internet encourage and engender "a leaderless resistance strategy, which means that individuals or groups conceive of themselves as part of a larger movement" without being directly tied to organizational structures.[13] Breivik developed his ideas about Christian Europe and 'Islamization' in a context consisting of on- and off-line rhetoric of scapegoating Muslim immigrants.

Qur'ans and Bibles have played important functions in populist right-wing circles to reinforce a worldview of the good 'us' and the evil 'them.' The use of sacred scriptures is one weapon in the arsenal of the far-right to shore up notions of a superior Christian Europe against an inferior Islamic 'other.' In November 2019, the leader of the far-right organization, 'Stop the Islamization of Norway,' burnt a Qur'an in a demonstration in the south of Norway. Danish far-right party *Stram Kurs* (Hard Line) have similarly held demonstrations involving the desecration of Qur'ans, throwing Qur'ans to the ground and burning Qur'ans in Muslim-majority neighborhoods. The leader of the party,

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11 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015), 55–57. Wilders' proclamation that a Judeo-Christian Western culture will be lost if it is not protected against immigration has been echoed by leaders of the far right across Europe. See Birgit Sauer and Edma Ajanovic, "Hegemonic Discourses of Difference and Inequality: Right-Wing Organisations in Austria," in *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and "Othering,"* ed. Gabriella Lazaridis, Giovanna Campani, and Anne Benveniste (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 81–108, at 94. In Austria both the Austrian Freedom Party and movements such as the Viennese Citizenship Initiative have spoken of Christianity as a criterion of inclusion into the Austrian people. Christianity is treated as a 'natural' common ground in contrast to the alleged 'natural' difference of Muslims.

12 Breivik's Manifesto, "2083 – A European Declaration of Independence," 12. The manifesto is available at https://publicintelligence.net/anders-behring-breiviks-complete-manifesto-2083-a-european-declaration-of-independence/ (accessed August 20, 2020). I cite the page numbers that correspond to the PDF. In this section Breivik is bemoaning the detrimental influence of what he calls "cultural Marxism."

13 Ralf Wiederer, "Mapping the Right-Wing Extremist Movement on the Internet – Structural Patterns 2006–2011," in *In the Tracks of Breivik: Far Right Networks in Northern and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mats Deland, Michael Minkenberg, and Christin Mays (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2013), 19–51, at 48.

Rasmus Paludan was filmed dousing a Qur'an in what he said was the semen of Christian men, before burning it.[14] He had allegedly previously wrapped a Qur'an in bacon.[15]

But the Qur'an is not the only sacred scripture to be paraded publicly in far-right rallies. Bibles—or bits of Bibles—have made sporadic appearances in far-right populist circles, from right-wing populist parties to extreme far-right actors. In the UK, for instance, the far-right British National Party produced an election poster in 2009 that featured a picture of Jesus and his words as recorded in the Gospel of John 15:20: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."[16] The biblical verse is followed by the question: "What would Jesus do?" To which the answer for the BNP was presumably to vote BNP in the European elections that year.

For National Rally in France, Joan of Arc is an iconic religious-nationalist figure whose annual celebration day has been a trademark for the party since 1978.[17] The founder of the party, Jean-Marie Le Pen, folded the legendary figure of Joan of Arc into the Jesus of the Gospels and the party's antagonistic politics when, quoting the Gospel of Matthew 10:34, he stated that she did not come to bring peace but a sword.[18] Here, a bit of biblical text is connected to a legendary figure for France, where both text and figure are made to speak to the present in the not-so-veiled message that violence might be necessary to protect France. This hint of violence is made concrete on the extreme end of the far right with the case of Breivik. Breivik quoted multiple passages from the Bible in the manifesto that was supposed to 'explain' his terrorist violence. The far-right terrorist called his acts of terror horrible but necessary to gain a platform for his 'political project.'[19] His lengthy manifesto of over 1500 pages is a

14 Rachael Kennedy, "Denmark's Quran-burning politician gathering support for election candidacy," *Euronews,* April 25, 2019, https://www.euronews.com/2019/04/25/denmark-s-quran-burning-politician-gathering-support-for-election-candidacy (accessed August 20, 2020).

15 Florian Elabdi, "Dane who wants to deport Muslims, ban Islam to run in election," *Aljazeera,* May 16, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/rasmus-paludan-danish-islamophobe-rises-political-stardom-190516090301567.html (accessed August 20, 2020).

16 Timothy Peace, "Religion and Populism in Britain: An Infertile Breeding Ground?," in *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy (London: Hurst & Co, 2016), 95–108, at 107.

17 Olivier Roy, "The French National Front: From Christian Identity to Laïcité," in *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy (London: Hurst & Co, 2016), 79–93, at 86.

18 Roy, "The French National Rally," 86.

19 Geir Lippestad *Det Kan Vi Stå For* (Oslo: Aschehaug, 2014), 41 (my translation).

cut-and-paste document made up of texts written by far-right ideologues. The manifesto calls for Europe to return to the Vulgate to aid the revival of Europe and resist the detrimental effects of politically correct modern Bible versions.[20]

The tendency to call for a defense of Christian Europe or a Christian West against the threat of Islam is propagated particularly in two related strands of far-right ideology, what is known as the Eurabia theory and counter-jihadism. The American Robert Spencer, Egyptian-British Bat Y'eor, and Italian Oriana Fallaci are key proponents of these views and have effectively pushed them on- and offline over the last decades. The idea is that political leaders in Europe, especially the European Union, are part of a conspiracy to turn Europe, and with Europe the West, into an Islamic colony.[21] Islam is seen as a totalitarian political ideology intent on taking over Europe, demographically, politically and theologically. A counter-jihad is what is needed to repel Islam.[22] In more and less extreme forms these views have taken hold in the European far-right and have even in some forms, as Mattias Ekman argues, "permeated into public discourse."[23] What is pertinent for my purposes is that the Bible is repeatedly emphasized by Spencer, Ye'or, and Fallaci as a theological-cultural common-ground for the West, signifying a superior civilization, while the Qur'an is demonized as anti-Western, anti-modern, and violent.

Extolling 'biblical values' in opposition to Muslims with their Qur'an is central to the Eurabia and counter-jihad discourse. These biblical values are treated as fundamental to, and a foundation for, Western civilization. Spencer claims that "values" and "moral principles" of Western countries are "rooted in Christian premises," values and principles that are shared with Judaism but "do not carry over into Islam."[24] This is Spencer's way of identifying the good and innocent Christian—or Judeo-Christian—'people' of the West in opposition to an Islamic 'other.' One of the key arguments of Spencer's *Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn't* is that the Bible does not encourage violence while the Qur'an does. When Spencer mentions Osama bin Laden quoting the Qur'an, he notes that "bin Laden's use of these and other passages

20 Breivik, "Manifesto," 1140.

21 See Øyvind Strømmen, *I Hatets Fotspor* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2014) and Øyvind Strømmen, *Det Mørke Nettet: Om Høyreekstremisme, kontrajihadisme og terror i Europa* (Cappelen Damm, 2012).

22 See Mattias Ekman, "Online Islamophobia and the politics of fear: manufacturing the green scare," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 11 (2015): 1986–2002, for a more expansive discussion of the key features of counter-jihadism.

23 Ekman, "Online Islamophobia and the politics of fear," 1986.

24 Robert Spencer, *Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn't* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2007), 3.

in his messages is consistent … with traditional Islamic understandings of the Qur'an."[25] According to Spencer there is in Islam "no interpretive tradition of the Qur'an comparable to the traditional Jewish and Christian approaches to the Bible."[26] Christians and Jews have utilized "symbolic, allegorical, historical, or poetic" language and modes of reading, while "Islam is much more literal, even when the text of the Qur'an itself is opaque and confusing—and the jihad passages in the Qur'an are anything but a dead letter."[27] Fallaci too insists on a defense of the specifically 'Christian' people and culture. The "religion in which our culture is steeped" is, she insists, Christianity.[28] The Qur'an, however, is repeatedly denigrated. The Qur'an, for Fallaci, is solely a wife-beating manual and killing machine.[29] It is also seemingly a form of text you can have in your "blood"; Fallaci complains that due to the historical presence of Muslims in Spain, "Islamization" is occurring more easily there in the present.[30] The Qur'an here is made liquid. It flows in the veins of particular people, making their very bodies Qur'anic.

The use of scripture, and specifically celebrating the Bible, is not necessarily about strong confessional allegiances. Fallaci, for instance, insists she is culturally Christian rather than religiously Christian.[31] Breivik, who cites Spencer, Ye'or, and Fallaci in his manifesto, similarly claims himself to be a cultural Christian, but insists this is legitimately Christian.[32] Breivik introduces himself in his manifesto as "a supporter of a monocultural Christian Europe."[33] He explains that he and his followers "do not necessarily have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God. We do however believe in Christianity as a cultural, social, identity and moral platform. This makes us Christian."[34] Whatever we make of these claims,[35] the Bible is claimed and the Qur'an is disclaimed. The Bible is mobilized as the exclusive possession of an exclusive people, which signifies that Islam—with its own sacred scripture—is 'other' and should remain on the 'outside' of the Western world. The populist exaltation

25 Spencer, *Religion of Peace?*, 70.
26 Spencer, *Religion of Peace?*, 70.
27 Spencer, *Religion of Peace?*, 70.
28 Oriana Fallaci, *The Force of Reason* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2004), 111.
29 Fallaci, *The Force of Reason*, 107, 174.
30 Fallaci, *The Force of Reason*, 81.
31 Fallaci, *The Force of Reason*, 185–186.
32 Breivik, "Manifesto," 1308.
33 Breivik, "Manifesto," 1404.
34 Breivik, "Manifesto," 1308.
35 For a discussion of such claims, see Hannah Strømmen and Ulrich Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity: Responding to the Far Right* (London: SCM Press, 2020).

of the people and the identification of an enemy is done with the help of the Bible. This is the idea that is at work in far-right populist uses of the Bible.

2 The Significance of Populist Scripture-Practices

There are at least three points about populist right-wing scripture-practices that I would like to elucidate to make sense of the above examples. First, in populist scripture-practices, reading and relating to sacred texts produce a clear picture of the enemy. Reclaiming particular texts becomes part of the battle against so-called elites and against Islam. Second, scriptures are used to feed a sense of the 'people' by mobilizing them to 'fill in' more vague appeals to 'our' culture versus 'their' culture. Third, populist scripture-practices are not so much about the 'reading' of texts, but rather draw our attention to other ways of engaging with texts as icons, as cultural symbols, and as material and affective artefacts.

Part of populist scripture-practices is reading scripture to identify the good people against the enemy people. This identification is part of the exclusionary politics, or "border politics," typical of right-wing populists, which emphasizes belonging and territorial boundaries against the 'others' who are deemed not to belong.[36] Protecting "the *Christian Occident* against the *Muslim Orient*" involves, in Ruth Wodak's words, a continuous "campaigning mode that implies Manichean divisions."[37] Bibles and biblical texts are used to shore up the notion of an enemy of 'the people.' The British National Party invocation of John 15:20—"If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you"—was an attempt to position themselves as the righteous persecuted people against an unjust power. The poster on which the biblical verse was emblazoned was a response to Church of England criticism of the racism of the BNP.[38] Citing John's Gospel was a way for BNP politicians to claim the Bible as legitimately theirs to use, rather than a possession of the church. The church could in this way be deemed the 'elite' while BNP could present themselves as persecuted: 'the people' with Jesus on their side. The enemy in this case was an example of one of the 'elites' right-wing populists often critique, namely the established church, in this case the Church of England.[39]

36 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 35.

37 Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 67.

38 Peace, "Religion and Populism in Britain: An Infertile Breeding Ground?," 106–107.

39 For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Mattias Martinson, *Sekularism, populism, xenofobi: En essä om religionsdebatten* (Malmö: Eskaton, 2017) and Ulrich Schmiedel, "Hijacked

Similarly, to emphasize the idea of a righteous victim against a giant enemy other, Breivik used the biblical imagery of David against Goliath from 1 Samuel 17 in his manifesto on several occasions.[40] In this imagery, the counter-jihadists fighting Islam become analogous to the Israelite people fighting the enemy people, the Philistines. In the Eurabia and counter-jihad milieu which Breivik identified with, the enemy is Islam but also the elites that are seen as complicit in welcoming Muslims, multiculturalism, and pluralization in Europe. Goliath, then, can conveniently stand in as an amalgamation of these enemy faces, integrated into one giant enemy figure. In this imagery, righteousness lies with David, the under-dog against the might of Goliath, underlining the idea of the good and worthy people fighting against a massive power.

The burning of Qur'ans is a visceral and violent way of identifying the enemy as Muslims, without actually doing violence to Muslim bodies. The idea of Muslims as synonymous with their 'Muslimness'—so frequently propagated by far-right populists—makes the gesture of burning a Qur'an even more effective for stoking hate. The obsession with the religiosity of Muslims, even when it is designated as 'cultural' otherness or 'politically' problematic, is highlighted in the burning of Qur'ans, and goes hand in hand with campaigns against the building of minarets and Islamic clothing. As mentioned above, a figure such as Paludan is performing his populist rhetoric about the good people against the bad Muslims who he claims not to belong in Denmark in a deliberately offensive manner by despoiling Qur'ans with, for instance, bacon. It is not fortuitous that the offense against Muslims is provocative and hurtful. It is both symbolic—in the association of Muslims with religiosity and with abstaining from eating pork—and a 'doing' of populism, by targeting the sacred text of Muslims and in this way making Muslims an enemy, undeserving of respect, compassion, and solidarity. The very vulgarity of these acts signals the refusal to accord Muslims with dignity and to see Muslims as anything but a homogenously bad people.

But the burning of Qur'ans performs another function. Namely, to provoke debates about freedom of speech.[41] Pietro Castelli Gattinara discusses the way far-right movements have mobilized strategically as defenders of liberal principles such as free speech to achieve acceptability and appear to be foregrounding

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or Hooked? Religion in Populist Politics in Germany," in *Is God a Populist? Christianity, Populism and the Future of Europe*, ed. Susan Kerr (Oslo: Frekk Forlag, 2019), 96–107.

40 Breivik, "Manifesto," 33, 1158, 1329.

41 See, for instance, Harald Klungtveit, "Ytringsfrihetsekspert uenig med politidirektøren: Koranbrenning ikke straffbart," November 21, 2019, https://filternyheter.no/ytringsfrihetsekspert-kritiserer-politidirektoren-ikke-straffbart-a-brenne-koranen/ (accessed August 20, 2020), on the debates that ensued after the Qur'an burnings in Norway on free speech.

legitimate liberal-democratic concerns.[42] They target "the cultural identity of specific groups of migrants, and their supposed incompatibility with liberal principles such as gender equality, free speech and secularism."[43] The burning of Qur'ans becomes a violent provocation and, supposedly, an exercise in freedom in the name of a Western secular society that is held up as incompatible with Islam and Muslims. It is performative populism, where sacred scripture is a key prop for designating 'us' who exercise the freedom to burn 'your' sacred text. Qur'ans and Bibles, as we see in these examples, can be used to reinforce an antagonistic worldview where there is an unambiguous enemy. As the case of Breivik shows, this ideology can spill into outright violence.

The second point in terms of populist scripture-practices is connected to the first in that it is about using scripture to sketch the contours of one culture against another culture. In the context of far-right populist rhetoric, citing biblical texts or celebrating the Bible as a foundation for Western culture is to treat this ancient archive as an iconic artefact that authorizes a reductive account of cultures as clearly delineated wholes. The idea of Islam with its own scripture comes to be naturalized as 'other.' Appeals to the culture of a 'people' are made more concrete by invoking the idea of different 'scripture-cultures.' Whether or not one is religious is irrelevant; different cultures are seen to be steeped in ancient scriptures that have permeated the history of different territories, cultures, and peoples. This is why far-right populist scripture-practices can be effective beyond specific confessional milieus and work more broadly also in a secular environment and with a semi-religious or even non-religious audience. Seyla Benhabib has shown the way culture has become synonymous with identity, as an identity marker and differentiator.[44] She argues that a 'reductionist sociology of culture' has become dominant in contemporary discourse.[45] A reductionist sociology of culture tends to essentialize culture as the property of a particular ethnicity or race. It risks reifying cultures as separate entities by exaggerating boundaries and distinctions; it overemphasizes a homogeneity supposedly internal to cultures. This notion of culture treats cultures as badges

42 Pietro Castelli Gattinara, "Framing Exclusion in the Public Sphere: Far-Right Mobilisation and the Debate on Charlie Hebdo in Italy," *South European Society and Politics* 22, no. 2 (2017): 345–364, at 346.

43 Gattinara, "Framing Exclusion in the Public Sphere," 346.

44 Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 4.

45 Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 4.

of group identity and fetishizes them as beyond nuance, ambiguity, and critical analysis.[46]

The justification for an exclusionary politics by populist right-wing figures draw on a logic of "the right to difference and recognition," which, as Hans-Georg Betz explains, is "designed to counter charges of xenophobia and racism."[47] But as Farid Hafez points out, the far right's focus on the absolute difference between, and incompatibility of, Western and Islamic cultures, "incorporates notions of religion and culture as by-products of a biological determinism that merely hides the notion of race that has become taboo in contemporary public discourses."[48] Hafez calls this the more "accepted racism" of Islamophobia.[49] Bibles and Qur'ans are part of the essentialization of the 'other' that underpins the racism of Islamophobia. Sacred texts are treated as foundational objects with ancient pedigree that endows cultures with an essence. Scriptures are also seen more diffusely as the carriers of theo-cultural legacies that determine the differences between peoples.

Invoking the Bible as a foundation of European culture appears to be a benign way of spouting truisms about the influence of Christianity and its scripture on Europe. But such truisms quickly slide into a rhetoric of superiority and essentialized difference, as is the case in the writings of far-right ideologues such as Spencer, Ye'or, and Fallaci. The antagonistic construction of different scripture-cultures conforms to what Elizabeth Shakman Hurd terms the "two faces of faith" paradigm.[50] In this paradigm the category of religion is split into a binary, where there is bad religion that requires discipline and surveillance and good religion which can be harnessed by faith leaders, governments and NGOs in the cause of social stability and peace.[51] Hurd argues that this "global dynamics of good religion-bad religion"[52] was accelerated by Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis in the 1990s and gained

46 Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 4.

47 Hans-Georg Betz, "Against the 'Green Totalitarianism:' Anti-Islamic Nativism in Contemporary Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe," in *Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right*, ed. Christina Schori Liang (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 33–54, at 34.

48 Farid Hafez, "Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity," *Patterns of Prejudice* 48, no. 5 (2014): 479–499, at 481.

49 Hafez, "Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity," 484.

50 Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 22–24.

51 Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*, 22–24.

52 Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*, 22.

momentum after 9/11.[53] This framework is arguably what is picked up in populist scripture-use—where the idea of a Western scripture-culture is sliced cleanly apart from other non-biblical cultures in order to act as the good face of religion versus the bad face of religion.

The third point I want to make about populist scripture-practices is that it does not involve much *reading*. Populist scripture-use can be a matter of selecting and highlighting bits of text on election posters, in speeches, or manifestos; of assembling different scriptural texts and combining them with figures or events from history, such as Joan of Arc or the Crusades. At other times, populist Bible use involves the physical or symbolic function of Qur'ans and Bibles as books, as signifiers of tradition and influencers of culture. The desecration of Qur'ans is a prime example of this use. None of these practices require much or any reading. Hence, my reference to practice rather than interpretation. We might talk about *scripture-use* and *scripture-users* rather than interpreters. Reading and not-reading may be involved; 'use' can be active and passive; practice can be performative, creative, repetitive, innovative, imitative. Familiarity with what is in the Bible or the Qur'an could—and often does—come not through reading, but mediated through popular culture, the media, tradition, education, or through internet platforms, blog posts, and comment fields. The materiality of Bibles and Qur'ans matter, as does the symbolic functions that Bibles and Qur'ans become caught up in.[54]

3 Political Scripture Research

So far, I have suggested that the notion of 'populist scripture-practices' could be useful in identifying transnational trends in European far-right populism. Populist scripture-practices entail a use of scripture that confirms the notion of the good people and their enemy. These scripture-practices hope to make-concrete the vague appeals to different cultures. Populist scripture-practices do not necessitate much reading. Crucially, this use of sacred scripture is a way of 'doing' populism. Populist rhetoric can be seen in political speeches and statements and party pamphlets. But the way populism is worked out in

53 Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*, 23.

54 There is interesting work being done by Qur'an scholars on the relationship between the Qur'an and the Bible. See for instance Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); and Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). Less work seems to have been done by Bible scholars on the Qur'an.

practice is also important. The gesture towards a snippet of biblical text, a biblical citation, or the holding up of a Bible,[55] the desecration of a Qur'an—all of these actions are part of practices that function as effective short-hands for propagating a populist worldview.

In conclusion, it would be easy to suggest that far-right populists should become better readers of scripture or more knowledgeable of the content of scripture, whether that is the Bible or the Qur'an. Yet I am not going to argue that if only they knew the Bible or the Qur'an better they would not hail the former and burn the latter, although perhaps that might be the case from time to time. Rather, my suggestion is that biblical scholars can learn from studies of populism and from political theology. But also, studies of populism and political theology can benefit from work done by biblical scholars. There is arguably a need for what I would call 'political scripture' research.

Biblical scholarship has tended to focus on the ancient origins, authors, and audiences of biblical texts. Learning from political theology, as Ulrich Schmiedel, drawing on Vincent Lloyd, discusses it in the introduction to this volume, as a non-reductionist approach to the interstices between the 'political' and the 'theological' (or in my case the 'scriptural'),[56] political scripture research could map dominant perceptions of the Bible that become embedded in political worldviews, discourses, rituals and practices. In other words, it would be a matter of not reducing the Bible either to a historical archive or to the possession of particular faith communities. Scripture cannot be confined to the academy, to churches, or to a private sphere, because uses of scripture are operative beyond these milieus. Mapping Bibles in public and political milieus can demonstrate where a particular idea or practice related to the Bible gains traction, probe the effects and affects of these ideas and practices, and point to the history of their emergence and the conditions within which such ideas and practices flourish. I am building here on the kind of biblical scholarship foregrounded by scholars such as Yvonne Sherwood, James Crossley, and Jonathan Sheehan.[57] Biblical scholars can learn from studies of phenomena such

55 A recent example of this can be seen in U.S. President Donald Trump's clearing of Black Lives Matter protesters on June 1, 2020, to pose for a photograph in front of a church holding a Bible in his hand. See Ian Frazier, "Donald Trump and Uses and Misuses of the Bible," *New Yorker,* June 15, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/donald-trump-and-uses-and-misuses-of-the-bible (accessed August 20, 2020).

56 Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

57 See for instance, Yvonne Sherwood, "Bush's Bible as a Liberal Bible (Strange Though That Might Seem)," *Postscripts* 2, no. 1 (2006): 47–58. See also her *Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012);

as populism to pay attention to what political trends and tendencies might condition the use of Bibles or engender particular biblical interpretations and practices, past and present.

Political scripture research along these veins would, in turn, contribute to studies of populism by moving beyond the metaphors of 'hijacking' that Schmiedel critiques in the introduction to this volume. As he puts it, "the metaphor of the hijacked faith presupposes that religion is a category that can be controlled, either by its legitimate or by its illegitimate owners."[58] Rather than ask, 'who are the owners of scripture?' (or assume we already know the answer to this question), it might be more interesting and constructive to ask: who is using scripture and to what effect? What are the assumptions that lie behind this use and what histories have influenced political scripture-practices? Or, as Fatima Tofighi asks in her chapter in this volume, in what way are particular interpretations and reading strategies responses to concrete socio-political conditions and contexts rather than evidence of a neat and linear interpretive progression when it comes to scripture?[59] To move away from simplistic and divisive categorizations of 'good' and 'bad' religions, Hurd, as Schmiedel explains in the Introduction to this volume, calls for research into lived religion.[60] Political Scripture research could further contribute to understanding political climates and phenomena, through more research into what I call 'lived scripture.'

The modes in which people and groups improvise with their scriptural idioms go beyond categories of reading or understanding, such as sophisticated and vulgar, the literal versus the liberal, confessional or non-confessional, populist and non-populist. Political scripture research could investigate how people live and relate with their Bibles not only focusing obsessively on how they understand the meaning of stories, or *what* they read, but how they treat their Bibles as material artefacts, what the Bible signifies in a larger political and cultural sense, and in what more oblique ways biblical texts or a sense of scripture influences them—or not. Examining how Bibles and biblical texts are used and interpreted by "flesh-and-blood" readers, to use Fernando Segovia's

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James Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Terror*: *Scholarly Projects for a New American Century* (London: Equinox, 2008), and *Cults, Martyrs and Good Samaritans: Religion in Contemporary English Discourse* (London: Pluto Press, 2018); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

58 Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism," in this volume.

59 Fatima Tofighi, "Hermeneutics, Politics and Liberalism in Islamic Modernity: Beyond Populism," in this volume.

60 Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom*, 8, 13, 122.

term,[61] has been the remit of contextual biblical interpretation, a sub-section in the discipline of biblical studies. Particularly non-Western scholars from the Global South, such as Musa Dube and Gerald West, have pioneered this research agenda.[62] Bringing this research on 'lived scripture' into studies of populism and political theology to better understand the relationship between religion and politics would help provide a more fine-grained understanding of political and theological trends and trajectories.

As Tofighi demonstrates in her chapter in this volume, attention to the details rarely reveals neat patterns or radical breaks with the past. In the same way that readings of the Qur'an are subject to the attentions and urgencies of particular contexts, uses and readings of the Bible in Western Europe are variable, even unpredictable. Demonstrating the ways in which scriptures are 'living,' in the sense that engagement with scripture and interpretation of scripture is on-going and changeable, can be iconoclastic when it comes to old and tired clichés. Following Robert Orsi, political scripture research is a call for attention to "religious messiness,"[63] to the local,[64] but also to the shared modalities that break down attempts at upholding 'otherness.' In his monograph on public biblical interpretation, Greg Carey argues for the value of diversity when biblical scholars encounter "reading communities on a global scale."[65] Stubborn perceptions of the Bible as a foundation for everything good about Western civilization, including secularization, or the idea of the Qur'an as un- or anti-modern and violent, are less easy to uphold in the face of the ambiguities, messiness, and complexity of 'lived scripture.' It is crucial that this

61 Fernando F. Segovia, "'And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues': Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 1–32, at 20.

62 See, for instance, Musa Dube and Gerald West, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Musa Dube, *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); Gerald O. West, *Reading Otherwise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007) and *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). The ordinary theology movement has also taken up so-called 'ordinary' readers of the Bible, see for instance Andrew Village, "The Bible and Ordinary Readers," in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, ed. Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 127–136.

63 Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 167.

64 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 167.

65 Greg Carey, *Using Our Outside Voice: Public Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 225.

research is cross-disciplinary and interreligious, particularly in confronting the ways the Bible and the Qur'an come to stand for the Janus face of religion. Political scripture research may do nothing to stop the spirit or the doing of populism. But it could offer the resources to confront and challenge the more mainstream scripts about a benign Bible and a barbaric Qur'an which help feed and foster far-right groups and rhetoric.

CHAPTER 7

Hermeneutics, Politics, and Liberalism in Islamic Modernity: Beyond Populism

Fatima Tofighi

The theme of a 'conflict of cultures' or a 'clash of civilizations' remains central in populist narratives.[1] In these narratives, Islam does not fit into Europe because it does not have the necessary tools to integrate within its 'liberal culture.' Attempts by Muslims to integrate are, at best, well-intentioned assimilations to something that is *not* Islamic. In the same vein, the alleged political underdevelopment of certain Muslim-majority countries is blamed on their political cultures which have failed to develop notions such as liberal politics, human rights, equal citizenship, and freedom. Narratives like these, which rest on Orientalist readings of Islamic cultures, have become predominant both among politicians and pundits. They have not stayed only on the level of populist rhetoric. Renowned scholars also seem to draw on them. These narratives are very similar to secularization stories in Europe, where modern political structures grow out of certain late medieval notions, traced back to Christian ideas.[2] In this sense, Christianity is deemed to be inherently more compatible with liberal democracy, or, to put it in a more nuanced fashion, certain readings of Christianity in medieval philosophy or Reformation theologies have paved the path for increasing political modernization. It is true that this kind of scholarship allows multiple modernities or different kinds of political development. Yet, it assumes a congruency between a particular culture

1 For a discussion of definitions of populism, see Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

2 See studies such as Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London: Penguin, 2014); Eric Nelson, *The Theology of Liberalism: Political Philosophy and the Justice of God* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Philip S. Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism, Confessionalism and the Growth of State Power in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008). These studies focus on the origins of contemporary political arrangements in Christianity. While allowing space for multiple modernities, liberalisms or democracies, they run the risk of restricting political developments of the kind we know to Christian origins.

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and its respective political structure. Islam, more particularly, has to develop its own possibilities for individualism, freedom, and rights. This replication of the European narrative in the Muslim world is reminiscent of modernization theses, where the line of development is the same everywhere, following the lead of the so-called developed world. If certain states, Islamic or secular, are not democratic enough, it is due to their political culture, a major component of which is religious reform. Marshall Hodgson's classic account, for instance, is centered on a radical rupture from the past in the Muslim world, where cultural institutions lag behind industrial modernizations.[3] Albert Hourani's well-known history of modern intellectual history in the Arab world rests on the assumption of cultural modernization only as a result of an encounter with the West, an assumption that he himself later retracted.[4] The distinction between perceptions of Islam as militant, on the one hand, and moderate, on the other, which is espoused by many European politicians, relies on the assumption that the political culture of some of these Islams is more compatible with European values, and therefore more suitable for integration policies.

A premise of these discussions is that, even if Islam has experienced a reform, 'unreformed' Islam is intolerant. Unreformed Islam is what we know, as it were, what we have seen in news footage, although it may, of course, be too graphic to watch. Even by the most politically correct standards, it may be admitted that the Qur'an contains passages that do not critique slavery, that endorse male superiority, and that condone *jihad* against unbelievers. After all, extremist Muslims mention such raw verses, which are, considering the best intentions of the readers, in want of re-interpretation. One symptom of such an attitude within the Muslim world is the proliferation of literature on 'hermeneutics' among public intellectuals such as Hassan Hanafi and Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd in Egypt and Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari in Iran, as a response to the dire need to re-read what has already been read.[5]

To challenge the above assumptions, I would like to focus on the ways in which today's 'reform interpretations' may or may not differ from the past,

3 Marshall Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 207–243.

4 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); Albert Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

5 This literature has been received so well in Iran, where I teach, that students are familiar with the word 'Hermeneutik.' While in the 1990s, Soroush faced harsh criticisms for his distinction between the earthly, debatable understanding of religion and its heavenly, inaccessible truth, it has now become self-evident among educated Iranians across the religious spectrum, regardless of the degree they apply this principle in their understanding of religion.

and how they relate to specific political questions. I pursue political scripture research, as Hannah Strømmen has proposed in her chapter in this volume.[6] Exegetes of the Qur'an did not often diverge from what preceding interpretations had already established, unless they needed to deal with a pressing issue. This says a lot about the structures of reform, reading, and political development. In other words, while scripture formed an important part of reform, we should not expect too much from it, nor should we see it as a central cause for creating liberal cultures or structures in politics. To make my case, I will introduce reform reading practices, pointing to the centrality of liberty. Then, I will investigate whether over-arching patterns of change can be found in modernist interpretations. The reception history of a controversial passage in the Qur'an reflects both continuity and discontinuity with the past. A fair analysis of modernist readings also requires paying attention to the developments within the movement. Finally, I will offer an interpretation of the relation between liberal hermeneutics and liberal politics to see whether drawing a straight line between the two is helpful at all.

1 Modernist Interpretations of the Qur'an

The modernist Qur'an emerged as an important component of reform Islam around the middle of the nineteenth century.[7] Despite their differences, Muslim reform thinkers distinguished between religion and culture, attributing the backwardness of their communities to the latter. They also called for *ijtihād*, novel understandings of religion. For them, the compatibility of the teachings of religion with reason needed to be discovered or re-discovered, *not* invented. This return to a 'pure' religion rested very much on a return to the Qur'an. In the following, I will chart some of the broad emphases of modernist interpretations of the Qur'an. The movement that I refer to here has been called

6 See Hannah Strømmen, "Sacred Scripts of Populism: Scripture-Practices in the European Far Right," in this volume.

7 In my story of the 'modernist' Qur'an, I rely on Yvonne Sherwood's scholarship on the invention of the 'liberal Bible,' the understanding of the Bible that has emerged in Europe and North America since the seventeenth century. Not only has this 'liberal Bible' become a point of reference in an increasingly secularized context, it has also led to a general ignorance of the biblical passages that seem to condone violence. See Sherwood, "The God of Abraham and Exceptional States, or the Early Modern Rise of the Whig/Liberal Bible," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 2 (2008): 312–343; Sherwood, "Bush's Bible as a Liberal Bible (Strange Though That Might Seem)," *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds* 2, no. 1 (2006): 47–58.

'reform Islam,' 'modernist Islam,' or 'Islamism,' although it arguably includes 'Islamist' and 'post-Islamist' thinkers.[8]

A major theme in reform Islam was human dignity. Developing some sort of social contract theory, many Muslim thinkers held human nature as the foundation of society. Premodern Muslims did have notions of a divine-human covenant where human beings had to follow divine law in order to avoid chaos. However, after the promulgation of the Western social contract theory, "it was deemed important somehow to integrate the traditional view on contracts as covenants offered by God to a people passively accepting it, supplemented by the secondary contract made by the leaders of the community among themselves to choose a supreme leader, with contracts as social conventions stressing the free will of people to manage their own affairs."[9] To develop such contract theories, scholars referred to Qurʾanic verses that called for "enjoining good and forbidding evil" (*al-ʾamr bilmaʿruf wa al-nahy ʿanil-munkar*) within the community, promoted the idea of public interest (*maṣlaḥah ʿāmmah*), and emphasized the harmony between human nature and divine law. To support divine sanction of human dignity, modernist intellectuals referred to 2:30, where God tells the angels "I am putting vicegerents (*ḫalīfah*) on earth." In 17:70, it is declared that God has dignified (*karramnā*) humans. While earlier exegetes referred to human dignity in terms of obligations, modernist authors focused on essential human rights and freedoms. Sayyid Qutb, a major representative of political Islam, went so far as to paint a Manichaean picture of the eternal conflict between God's human vicegerent and Satan as the representative of evil.[10] The key to victory in this struggle is commitment to the divine covenant, while submission to one's desires brings about damnation.[11]

Human freedom is so important that human beings have the right to question the prophets and reject them. For Muslim reform thinkers, this idea is confirmed by a few verses to the effect that the Prophet only reaches out to bring the message, but cannot force anyone to accept it.[12] In line with the idea of

8 My use of the word 'modernist' rather than 'modern' relies on a distinction between the two, where the latter is more related to the adoption of industry, technology, and bureaucracy, while the former is cultural, a mode of inquiry. Although accounts about the beginnings of modernism in different regions differ, it may be roughly dated in the mid-twentieth century.

9 Shahrough Akhavi, "Sunni Modernist Theories of Social Contract in Contemporary Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003): 23–49, at 26.

10 Sayyid Qutb, *Maʿalim fi'l-Ṭariq* (Cairo: Dar al-Shurūq, 1988), 10; quoted in Mohsen Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e tafsīrī-e muʿāsir va mas'aliy-e āzādi* (Tehran: Ney, 1388/2009), 191–192. Armin argues that Qutb had borrowed this from Abul A'al Mawdudi.

11 Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e*, 186.

12 "If they turn away, you have only the mission to reach out, and God knows what the servants do" (3:20); "and if your Lord had wanted, all the inhabitants of the earth would have

freedom, a major slogan of modernist Islam was "there is no force in religion. The paths of development and delusion are known" (2:256). This implied that humans are free to choose their own beliefs and behaviors. At the same time, however, there were those thinkers who contended that there is no force in matters of conscience, but only on the condition that the two paths are clear. Hence, it is not wrong to force religion on those who cannot understand the message, such as children. A characteristically polemical passage by Qutb on the above verse reads:

> This verse reflects divine esteem of humans and divine respect for their will and thought and emotions and grants human beings choice and responsibility of their own actions. This is a special feature of human freedom in Islamic thought. It is a freedom that is denied by twentieth-century oppressive regimes that will contempt humans. They will not allow humans to have a belief outside what is set out by governments through their laws and propaganda. In this framework, humans have only two options: either to leave God and follow the will of the governments or to put themselves at risk of destruction.[13]

This reading of freedom of conscience also affects the ways that *jihad* is understood. There are some verses to the effect that the purpose of *jihad* is to remove "*fitna*."[14] While for earlier exegetes *fitna* meant idolatry (*shirk*)—hence *jihad* was understood as aiming to convert people to monotheism—for many modernist exegetes the word came to mean force in matters of conscience.[15] In this manner, 2:193 is read to mean that Muslims should fight with oppressors so that no one can force you (through *fitna*) to leave your religion so that your

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been safe. Would you force people to believe?" (10:99); "if their denial is hard on you, you could just as well bring a hole in earth or a ladder to the sky to bring a sign for them. [But you cannot.] And if God had wanted, God would have brought them to guidance. So, do not be foolish!" (6:35); "You [the Prophet] are not compelling them," (88:1); "And say God has the conclusive argument; and if God had wanted, God would have guided them all," (6:149); "We know what they say; you are not going to force them. So, bring the Qur'an to the attention of those who fear our punishment" (50:45).

13 Sayyid Qutb, *Fī ẓilal al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Shurūq, 1992), vol. 1, 291, quoted in Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e,* 188–189.

14 "And fight with them until there is no *fitna* and the entire religion is for God, and if they stop their wrong ways, do not violate anyone but the oppressors" (2:193; with almost similar language 8:39); "removing its inhabitants is more important for God and *fitna* is even more important than killing" (2:217); "and expel them from where they have expelled you, and *fitna* is bigger than killing" (2:191).

15 Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsīr al-manār* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-misriyyah al-ammah lilkitab, 1990), vol. 9, 665 and vol. 3, 218; quoted in Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e,* 136–137.

religion comes from God rather than fear of idolaters. In this sense, *jihad* is a way to keep one's own freedom of conscience instead of eliminating the followers of other religions.[16] Qutb did not restrict *fitna* to idolatry. *Fitna*, for Qutb, was anything that stood in the way of faith, including the policies of non-Islamic governments that distracted people from faith.[17] That is why he suggested three purposes for *jihad*: elevating the word of God on earth; establishing divine ways in human life; and supporting Muslim believers against *fitna* and oppression, which is not achieved except through eliminating the powers that are not from God.[18] For the Iranian scholar Mahmoud Taleqani, since it established divine government, *jihad* provided the necessary conditions for freedom, because one could only choose for oneself in a situation that was free from threats.[19]

Jihad was also corroborated by the idea of "enjoining good and forbidding wrong" (*al-ʾamr bi-l maʿruf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar*), though the meaning of the latter is very broad. The concept is mentioned a few times in the Qur'an as a sign of a good community (*ummah*) (3:104, 110; 9:71). For many modernist thinkers, it referred to a major basis for democratic institutions with the aim of preserving essential political and civil liberties, although some, such as Qutb, understood their notion of *jihad* as a way to establish divine sovereignty on which the Islamic state can be built.

A very well-known instance of the employment of Qur'anic concepts in democratic Islamic government theory is the idea of 'consultation' (*šūrā*). Many reform thinkers highlighted the Qur'an's support for democracy. One verse was 3:159 (my emphasis): "Due to divine mercy, you are mild to them. If you had been harsh and rude, they would have abandoned you. So, forgive them, and ask for God's forgiveness for them; and *consult with them.* But if you decide on something, trust in God. God loves those who trust in God." Another famous verse in this respect is 42:38, where "consultation (*šūrā*) among themselves" is mentioned as one of the attributes of true believers. The command to consult with others shows the importance of public opinion. Today, *šūrā* is the word that is used to refer to the parliament in many Arab countries. In earlier exegeses, this verse was read as implying consultation with the elite rather than the public.[20] Some modernist scholars held that consultation is obligatory and some held that it is optional, while others considered it necessary only for certain issues. Mohsen Armin suggests that Qutb's telling silence on

16 Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e,* 137.
17 Qutb, *Fi ẓilal,* vol. 1, 189.
18 Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e,* 201.
19 Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e,* 245.
20 Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e,* 223.

this issue demonstrates that, although he held *šūrā* in great esteem, he perhaps could not abide by the conclusion that the public had the vote.[21]

Tawhīd, belief in the oneness of God, was also one of the recurring themes for modernist Muslims. The oneness of God implied the rejection of any authority except God. In this sense, accepting dictatorship is akin to idolatry. *Tawhīd* could also imply the oneness of the entire community under God. According to the Iranian philosopher and exegete, Muhammad Hossein Tabataba'ei, in Islam divine oneness unfolds through laws. Because governments comprise laws, they are sacred manifestations of the divine.[22] Tabataba'ei was aware that Islamic teachings and texts did not actually contain answers to all questions, but he granted the governing authorities the right to set out laws that then became a manifestation of divine sovereignty. The centrality of *Tawhīd* for Tabataba'ei meant that he considered it an essential human right. Hence, although Tabataba'ei allowed for defensive war only, his definition of defense included the "essential human right" to believe in the oneness of God, which meant that those who would force their own beliefs on monotheists could be attacked.[23]

Another major emphasis in modernist Islam was 'justice' (*'adl/qisṭ*). The Qur'an is replete with references to the concept. Believers are commanded to fulfill justice (4:135; 5:8; 16:90); justice is one of the purposes of the prophets (3:21; 5:42; 10:47; 75:28; 42:15); and it is also the reason behind many laws (4:3, 58, 129). Modernist literature referred to social contract theory, human dignity, and equality in order to criticize many forms of injustice that were prevalent in society. The more socialist Islamists used this emphasis on justice to promote their radical efforts. Others linked the idea of justice with freedom.

An emphasis on themes like these is important because in modernist literature 'thematic' interpretations of the Qur'an flourished. These exegetical works proceeded theme by theme rather than verse by verse. This meant that they could overlook the verses that might counter the overall theme. (While the major themes that were used in this regard were divine oneness and justice, due to the ambiguity of these two concepts, their use did not necessarily guarantee the liberatory character of a particular exegesis.) An important contribution was made by what Muslim feminist exegesis calls 'holistic' readings.[24] Here, overarching concerns shed light on particular passages. For example,

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21 Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e,* 223.

22 Muhammad Hossein Tabataba'ei, *Al-mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Mo'assasah al-a'lamī lilmaṭbū'āt, 1971), vol. 4, 109; quoted in Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e,* 272.

23 Tabataba'ei, *Al-mīzān,* vol. 4, 164; Armin, *Jaryānhāy-e,* 279–281.

24 Aysha Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 110–120.

if justice and divine oneness are taken as overarching themes, verses on the authority of men over women can be dissolved in the more general command to accept no authority except God (in line with divine oneness). The seemingly patriarchal verses, then, need to be historicized in order to fit the universal demands of divine justice. These 'liberal' readings of Islamic teachings (akin to liberal understandings of Christianity in Europe) became so sacred that it was hard to challenge them. Yet a major problem with these readings was that, according to Armin, they were not consistent in their approach to the question of freedom. A single author might rationalize freedom, but then extend it only to a particular group, such as Muslim believers. Authors may object to force in religion, but then rule out some possibilities that may presumably endanger their faith.

These difficulties were one reason why another development within reform thinking took place: the emergence of 'post-Islamism.' According to Asef Bayat, "post-Islamism" refers to a social and political condition "where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, and sources of legitimacy of Islamism are exhausted even among its once-ardent supporters… Islamism becomes compelled, both by its own internal contradictions and by societal pressure, to reinvent itself, but it does so at the cost of a qualitative shift". Post-Islamist also refers to a project that is

> neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic or secular.… It is an attempt to turn the underlying principles of Islamism on their head by emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures, and the future instead of the past.… [W]hereas Islamism is defined by the fusion of religion and responsibility, post-Islamism emphasizes religiosity and rights. Yet, while it favors a civil and nonreligious state, it accords an active role for religion in the public sphere.[25]

One of the most vocal representatives of post-Islamism, the Iranian philosopher of religion Abdolkarim Soroush called for the historicization of scripture, the relegation of religion to the realm of the private and the spiritual, and the denial of the authority of one particular reading of religion over others.[26] Soroush went so far as to suggest a new theory of divine revelation, where the

25 Asef Bayat, "Post-Islamism at Large," in *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam,* ed. Asef Bayat, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3–34, at 8.

26 Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Qur'an emerged from the Prophet just as honey emerges from honeybees, not as in the classical theory where the scripture was the work of a parrot merely echoing what had been given to it.[27] Instead, the Prophet, whose spirit had reached the height of purity and perfection, had dreams which he retold in his own words. Soroush's theories were not only meant to explain contradictions within the Qur'an, but also to historicize its content. They also justified what many post-Islamist intellectuals believe: that the Qur'an is not a book of law. The Pakistani-American author Fazlur Rahman offered the "double movement theory" in Qur'anic interpretation, which served as the basis for some versions of liberationist and feminist exegesis.[28] To understand a passage, Fazlur Rahman suggested moving it back to its historical milieu in order to get to its core message, before bringing the core message to our own situation. While many verses are historicized, their major themes of divine oneness, justice, and the like are universalized.

In this sense, the job of a reformist thinker is to limit the role of religion in social and political affairs, rather than to extend its authority. While this 'minimalist' reading of religion fostered the hope for a reconciliation of Islam with liberal democracy, this vision seems too optimistic. First, for most of the reformist thinkers, religion remains the pillar on which politics rests.[29] Religion decides how much secularization the state requires. Second, it is difficult to decide where the limits of modern state authority lie. That is, when the state pervades many areas of public and private life, the 'untouched' areas to which religion belongs cannot be easily determined. Third, reformist readings rest on a secular normativity that is itself the result of the European experience; as such, it has failed to overcome its own contradictions.[30]

2 The Dangers of 'Unreformed' Islam

In order to assess the responses of modernist and premodern interpretations of the Qur'an, I will point to the reception of one 'problematic' passage in the

27 Yaser Mirdamadi, "Soroush's Theory of Qur'anic Revelation: A Historical-Philosophical Appraisal," in *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Iran,* ed. Alessandro Cancian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 149–182.

28 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

29 Mohammad Mahdi Mojahedi, "'Is There Toleration in Islam?' Reframing a Post-Islamist Question in a Post-Secular Context," *ReOrient* 2, no. 1 (2016), 51–27, at 65.

30 Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006), 323–347; Charles Hirschkind, "What Is Political Islam?" in *Political Islam: A Critical Reader,* ed. Frederic Volpi (London: Routledge, 2010), 13–15.

Qur'an that seems to endorse domestic violence. According to 4:34, men are (should be?) women's guardians because men provide for women and because God has privileged some over others. In case women do not obey their husbands, men should advise them, abstain from sharing their beds with them, and finally beat them. This passage has two problematic sections. The first section grants wholesale authority and guardianship of women to men and the second section consequently grants authority to men to beat women.

Earlier exegetes tried to justify guardianship with reference to the better share of men in reasoning and power, their higher responsibilities in providing for the family and marriage, them having more obligations according to Sharīʿa, or their ontological superiority.[31] The Andalusian scholar Shams al-Din Qurtubi (d. 1273) wrote, "It is said that men have more reason and management. That is why they are women's guardians. It is also said that men have more power in soul and nature, as men's nature is hotter and drier, full of power and strength, while women's nature is filled with humidity and coldness, resulting in softness and weakness, and that is why men are guardians."[32] Later exegesis, however, elaborated on natural differences as the basis for male guardianship. The Persian scholar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi (d. 1210) explained what he called "real qualities" and "legal qualities" as reasons behind male superiority (*fadl*). According to al-Rāzi

> The real virtues refer to knowledge and power, and there is no doubt that men have more power and knowledge, and no doubt that their power in difficult works is more perfect. That is why they have a better standing in reason and determination and strength. Men have other virtues as well. In most cases, they are able to write. They are better in horse-riding and archery. From among them, prophets and scholars have arisen. Greater and lesser leadership, *jihad*, call to prayers, sermons, spiritual recluse, testimony in *ḥudud*[33] and *qisās*,[34] and—according to al-Shāfiʿi—testimony in marriage exclusively belongs to them. Men also enjoy a bigger share in inheritance, and more blood-price both in murder and unintended murder, among other legal virtues.[35]

31 Fatima Tofighi and Sajedeh Yusofi, "Taḥlīl-e guftimān-e tafāvutʼhāy-e jinsīyatī dar tafāsīr-e 4:34," *Pazhuheshnameye zanan* 9, no. 3 (1397/2018): 29–50.

32 Shams al-Din Qurtubi, *Al-Jāmiʾ liʾaḥkām al-Qurʾan* (Tehran: Naser Khosrow, 1985/1364), vol. 5, 169.

33 Punishment for certain sins such as adultery, drunkenness, theft. The exact measures of these punishments are set out in the law, regardless of the cases.

34 Retaliation in kind.

35 Fakhr al-Din Rāzi, *Mafātih al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dar Ihyaʾ al-turath al-arabi, 1420/1999), vol. 10, 71.

By contrast, in modernist interpretations, men and women were deemed merely different. The Lebanese scholar Muhammad-Javad Mughniyyah (d. 1979) noted this difference in men's and women's achievements in the public sphere: "When we see that great works in the sphere of knowledge and religion and arts and philosophy and politics have all been done by men, while women rarely get a standing in these things, it is clear that a rare occurrence confirms the rule rather than contradict it."[36] While noting the Qur'an's reference to male superiority (*faḍl*), the Iranian female scholar Nusrat Amin (d. 1986) qualified it: "It is true that God has given men superiority in certain things. But this superiority is general and typical, rather than inclusive of every particular man and woman. It is clear that many women have had superiority in management and reasoning and even physical qualities over men."[37] The Iraqi scholar Muhammad Hossein Fadlallah (d. 2010) historicized the verse by claiming that "lived experience shows that many women who lived in situations similar to the particular and general lived situations of men were able to show their power in focus, consciousness, and subtle feeling in every situation that existed in their mental and practical spheres."[38]

With regard to the second part of the verse which seems to justify men beating women, scholars had different suggestions too. While the word *ḍarb* literally means 'beating,' exegetes looked for ways to minimize the force of this commandment. Mahdi Mehrizi summarizes the interpretations by dividing them into those that understood it to be universally and those that understood it to be temporarily binding.[39] Even the advocates of the universality of the verse, who mostly belong to the premodern interpreters, suggested ways to undermine it. Some said that beating should be only minimal, and that it should not cause any bruises. In the twentieth century, the authors of *Tafsīr-e nimūni* pointed to 'scientific' findings on women's masochistic needs so that beating became a means to relieve their frustration.[40] Others held that *darb* meant leaving the house to give one's wife the 'silent treatment.' However, some scholars were not satisfied with these universal readings.[41] For example,

36 Muhammad-Jawad Mughniyyah, *Al-Tafsīr al-kāshif* (Tehran: Dār ulkutub al-islamī, 1424/2003), vol. 2, 316.

37 Nusrat Amin, *Makhzan ul-ʿirfān dar tafsīr al-qur'an* (Tehran: Nashr-e nehzat-e zanān-e muslamān, 1361/1982), vol. 4, 63.

38 Mohammad Hossein Fadlallah, *Tafsīr min waḥy al-Qur'an,* (Beirut: Dār al-malāk liṭṭibā'ah wa al-nashr, 1419/1998), vol. 7, 235–236. See also Tofighi and Yusofi, "Taḥlīl-e," 29–50.

39 Mahdi Mehrizi, "Taṭawwur-e didgāh'ha dar tafsīr-e 4:34," *Tahqiqate ulum-e Qur'an va hadith* 2, no. 1 (1384): 7–35.

40 *Tafsīr-e nimūni,* ed. Naser Makarem Shirazi (Qom: n.p., 1353/1964), vol. 3, 415–416; quoted in Mehrizi, "Taṭawwur-e," 22–24.

41 Mehrizi, "Taṭawwur-e," 27–30.

Muhammad Hadi Ma'refat (d. 2007) historicized the verse by reference to the idea of *naskh tamhīdī* (provisional abrogation).[42] This means that when Islam meant to abolish a practice, it took measures to do it gradually. Seen in this perspective, the verse put conditions on beating, and then supplied other kinds of evidence to provide the conditions for its later abrogation.[43] By contrast, the Tunisian Mohamed Talbi (d. 2017) held that before this verse was revealed, men were punished for beating their wives. The revelation of the verse took place during a war in order to appease the men who were not participating in the fight. Hence, it was not meant to be binding afterwards.[44]

All of these interpretations of 4:34 show that even the most literalist exegetes were uncomfortable with the idea of men beating their wives so they tried to circumvent it.[45] My collection of interpretations also shows that it is difficult to draw a line between pre-modern and modernist exegesis. While there are differences between them, they can only be observed on certain issues. This suggests that reform Islam was not meant to create the political culture that liberal democracy might demand. Reform Islam was, rather, directed at pragmatic issues of a particular community. Accordingly, our conceptions of modern and premodern—so-called 'unreformed' Islam—need to be more nuanced. Reform Islam was not a break with the past, but a process of self-critique and self-reformation. It is true that many of the teachings of modernist thinkers have become so solidly established that it is hard to challenge them. Yet, intellectuals keep criticizing each other to offer new insights. 'Unreformed' Islam was not entirely driven by insensitivity to rights and freedoms either. While the exegetes presented here did not approach anything like a 'liberal' reading of religion, premodern authors were often uncomfortable with the literal meaning of certain passages. The fact that premodern interpretations are not seen as harsher than the modernist interpretations does not imply that the Islamic tradition in any era has no potential for 'liberal' readings. On the contrary, my point here is that exegetes have *always* found ways to circumvent the literal meaning of a text. Whether they wanted to do this at all, has depended to a large degree on their sociopolitical context. Contrary to common perception, then, fundamentalism does *not* rest on literalism. According to Mieke Bal, fundamentalism assumes that sacred scriptures answer all the questions we

42 Abrogation (*naskh*) in classical Qur'anic studies means that the ruling that is based on an earlier verse is abrogated in favor of the ruling that is based on a later verse, without eliminating the former verse.

43 Mohammad-Hadi Ma'refat, *Faslnameye pazhuhesh'haye qur'ani* (n.p.: n.p., 1380/2001), 25, 26; quoted in Mehrizi, "Taṭawwur-e," 24–25.

44 Mohamed Talbi, *Al-ummah al-wasaṭ* (n. p.: 1996), 133; quoted in Mehrizi, "Taṭawwur-e," 26.

45 Mehrizi, "Taṭawwur-e," 7–35.

ask them, while literalism means opening up to the text to read the multiple possibilities that the letter of the text would offer.[46] Fundamentalist readings of the Qur'an, then, are, anything but literalist. The moral baggage of the readers determines the sort of conversations they have with their scriptures. This moral baggage requires them (and more than them, their scriptures) to take a stance against oppression, inequality, and injustice. Therefore, for scholars, it would be much more fruitful to study the reading strategies that exegetes bring to certain passages on a case-to-case basis, instead of presuming distinctions between pre-modern and modern (Islamist and post-Islamist) exegeses.

3 From Liberal Hermeneutics to Liberal Politics?

The idea of compatibility between political culture and political structure is at the core of the racialization of cultures. The concept of political culture was put forward in post-war social sciences in order to escape earlier racialized readings, thus providing space for political change as a result of cultural engineering (instead of eugenics). Nowadays, the concept feeds into discussions about the relation between Islam and violence. Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington are known as the major advocates of the culturalization of politics.[47] Their 'culturalist' tone has been criticized for its essentialism, its determinism, and its inaccuracy. It rests on a depoliticization of politics that relies only on cultural development. This idea is so central to the Islamist and the post-Islamist agenda that its abandonment might mean the end of post-Islamism. By contrast, focusing on politics may draw attention to what needs to be changed within political structures, nationally and internationally.[48] A political analysis of social structures helps to understand Islamist movements as pragmatic responses to concrete sociopolitical situations. Mohammed Ayoob and Danielle N. Lussier's study of political Islam confirms that it comprises particular movements that aimed at solving specific issues in any particular context and changes within a movement in turn depended on changes in those contexts. In this sense, there is no such thing as one singular political Islam.[49]

46 Mieke Bal, *Loving Yusuf: Conceptual Travels from Present to Past* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 4.

47 See, for instance, their influential articles Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic* 9 (1990): 47–60 and Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72/3 (1993): 22–49.

48 Mojahedi, "Post-Islamist," 51–72.

49 Mohammed Ayoob and Danielle N. Lussier, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in Muslim Societies* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2020).

Hence, while reform readings have affected much of the public discourse on freedom and rights in Islam (thus creating a 'liberal' Qur'an), these readings do not necessarily help with creating political structures.

If we accept, together with Abdou Filali-Ansary and Nader Hashemi that, in contrast to Christian Europe, in Muslim-majority countries, secularization preceded religious reform,[50] we may understand the driving force behind modernist interpretations. Secularization and modernization provided the discursive categories upon which much of reform Muslim literature was built. The discussion of gender roles explained above is only one example. However, the modernist response was also that of overcoming self-alienation, searching for meaning in a disconnected history, and even piecing together a broken identity. According to Ori Goldberg, for many of these religious thinkers, faith provided a path to both grasp and transcend linear history, within the chaos of increasing modernization.[51] Qutb, for instance, grappled with these conflicts:

> Qutb's modern emancipated self cannot be achieved through a turn inward away from commercial society or upward through losing oneself in God. It cannot be achieved privately because the development of a certain moral personality has to occur within comprehensive social relationships that eradicate domination and competition for esteem and advantage… [Still,] modern alienation per se is only half of Qutb's problem. He is writing as a postcolonial subject experiencing secularism not only as dehumanizing and alienating, but also as a literally alien imposition. … Qutb's response is necessarily a turn to shariʿa . His modernization of shariʿa does not consist in reforming its content or in allowing a modern Muslim community to collectively search for God's Law …, but rather in theorizing shariʿa's harmonization of innate human dispositions and the changing social needs of Muslim communities in an a priori way. The result is a claim not only to shariʿa's suitability for the modern era, but a mutual indispensability between shariʿa and political life.[52]

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50 Nader Hashemi, "Rethinking the Relationship between Religion and Liberal Democracy: Overcoming the Problems of Secularism in Muslim Societies," in *Islam, the State, and Political Authority: Medieval Issues and Modern Concerns,* ed. Asma Afsaruddin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 173–187; Abdou Filali-Ansary, "The Challenge of Secularization," in *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East,* ed. Larry Diamond, Marc Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003), 232–236.

51 Ori Goldberg, *Shiʿi Theology in Iran: The Challenge of Religious Experience* (London: Routledge, 2012).

52 Andrew March, "Taking People As They Are: Islam As a 'Realistic Utopia' in the Political Theory of Sayyid Qutb," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (2010): 189–207, at 193.

Studying the various justifications of Qur'anic passages within particular socio-political frameworks, as I have suggested here, would confirm John Bowen's response to Olivier Roy's *Is Europe Christian?*.[53] The "question would then be, not 'Is Europe Christian?' (or is Indonesia Muslim, or is India Hindu), but what are the practices of orienting action and justifying those actions that involve recourse to self-styled religious frames? And, what are the structures of orientation and control that facilitate, impede, steer, and control these practices and justifications?"[54]

4 Conclusion: Hermeneutics as a Dynamic Process

One job of academics is to find overarching patterns. Even when they point to ruptures, they often take them as breaks between recurring patterns. My conclusion is to question this desire for patterns—between hermeneutics and politics and between different kinds of Islam. I tried to assess a very common assumption in scholarship on Islam, namely that liberal politics demands a liberal political culture, leading to a liberal hermeneutics, which is missing in the case of 'unreformed' Islam. As mentioned earlier, many definitions of populism emphasize this duality between the liberal friend and the illiberal foe. The struggle for proper readings should be understood in light of these distinctions. While many academics react to the idea of the strangeness of liberal politics to Islam in far-right discourse, they do themselves fall into the traps of their own categories, when they assume that there is a stable divide between pre-modern and modern readings of the Qur'an which proofs that hermeneutics must be 'liberal' in order for politics to be liberal too. We have yet to find better ways to counter claims about the allegedly inherent illiberality of Islam.

As I have argued in this chapter, modern Islamist and post-Islamist readings of the Qur'an contain themes that contributed to something like classical liberalism. However, they did not meet the demands of a fully-fledged liberalism. Moreover, traditional Islamic exegesis also involved strategies to get around the literal meaning of 'problematic' passages. What marks reform Islam, then, is not so much a new kind of exegesis, but a set of new concerns. What happens,

53 Olivier Roy, *Is Europe Christian?*, trans. Cynthia Schoch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

54 John R. Bowen, "Are Societies Religious? (Or Is There a Better Question?)," *The Immanent Frame,* July 21, 2020, https://tif.ssrc.org/2020/07/21/are-societies-religious/?fbclid=IwAR2VEyOzyDiObA-I-g8Y3tRnKzHY_42roAV9ca6BoxIkTXcj-n2yRC200kc (accessed August 11, 2020).

then, to political development? Should we expect a future point when reform Islam reaches the zenith of liberal culture for political liberalism to emerge (assuming that the latter is what we should want at all)? Political developments proceed with and without the interpretation of scripture. Hermeneutics can be a component of these developments. Yet, its contribution largely depends on the way in which the political structure deals with the questions of toleration, discrimination, and human self-alienation. Instead of an agenda that needs to be controlled, hermeneutics is a dynamic process that will continue to answer its own particular concerns and provide modes of justification within concrete economic and political frameworks.

CHAPTER 8

"If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem": Zionism and the Politics of Collective Memory

Brian Klug

1 Remembering Zion

Psalm 137, from which this chapter gets its title, opens with a moving scene of collective grief over a collective memory:[1] "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat, we also wept, when we remembered Zion" (verse 1). The collective subject of the psalm, "we," having been taken captive and uprooted from Zion, sits passively, weeping, mourning, mocked by tormentors who demand: "Sing us one of the songs of Zion" (verse 3). The psalmist responds: "How shall we sing a song of the Lord on alien ground?" (verse 4), implying that Zion connotes the Lord and that, being on "alien ground," they are, in a sense, alienated from the divine. The psalm is thus a complex song about the impossibility of singing in exile, where exile is the loss not just of home but of everything worth having: everything that is signified by the name 'Zion.'

This complex song haunts the imagination of Jews, who, collectively, identify with the psalmist's 'we.' Placing Psalm 137 in a larger scriptural and liturgical setting, I shall discuss the role it plays in the ideology of political Zionism, focusing in particular on the recurring controversy over the political status of Jerusalem in the polarized conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. This chapter is thus a case study in political theology, understood as the application of theological categories to political discourse. There is, however, a twist. A central feature of populism (on my understanding) is the act or project of constituting 'the people' against its Others in a specifically political context.[2] In this chapter, that context is the State of Israel and 'the people' in question is the *Israeli* people. But in the context of Judaism today, the psalmist's

1 This chapter is based on a lecture given at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, May 4, 2018, in the 'Hilda B. Silverman Memorial Lecture' series. The lecture was revised for the conference 'The Spirit of Populism', School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, September 2019. A longer version of this chapter will be published in a compilation of Hilda B. Silverman Lectures that is in process.

2 Brian Klug, "Populismus," in *SprachGewalt: Missbrauchte Wörter und andere politische Kampfbegriffe*, ed. David Ranan (Bonn: Dietz, 2021), 31–41.

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'we' is the *Jewish* people, which is not an identity tied to a state: it is not a *political* identity.[3] Political Zionism, as an ideology, conflates 'Jewish' and 'Israeli' peoplehood, turning the first, which lies at the heart of Judaism, into a political category. This is encapsulated in the iconography of the flag of the State of Israel, whose design features the Star of David against a background based on the *tallit* or Jewish prayer shawl. The flag does not merely express the idea that Israel is a Jewish state. It reflects a Zionist conception of the state as 'the nation state of the Jewish people.' Concomitantly, it reflects a Zionist conception of Judaism as centred on a state. So, in the Israeli context, the populist act or project does not consist simply in taking a portion of the state's population—the Jews—and constituting them as 'the people,' over and against, say, the Arab or Palestinian Other. It consists, simultaneously, in taking the Jewish people at large—all Jews, everywhere—and reconstituting them as the (real or true) Israeli people. So, when the populist potential of Psalm 137 is harnessed, its appeal is directed not only at Israeli Jews, but at Jews globally, including, for example, me.

In his introduction to this volume, Ulrich Schmiedel writes that "the spirit of populism is conceptualized as expansively and as elastically as possible in order to explore the sometimes hidden and sometimes not so hidden significance of political theology for populism".[4] This chapter is a case in point: it stretches the scope of political theology for populism beyond the borders of the state—beyond constituting Israeli Jews as 'the people' (and Palestinians as Other). Its 'hidden' significance lies in transmuting the idea of peoplehood that lies at the heart of Judaism, folding Judaism into Zionism.

If the collective memory of Zion is the focus of Psalm 137, the psalm has itself become part of the collective memory of the Jewish people. Except that, as Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi points out, there has been "a kind of oblivion that covers the last verses."[5] In these 'forgotten' verses, the psalmist calls down the wrath of God on the Edomites (verse 7), but chiefly on Babylon for what Babylon has "done to us" (verse 8), concluding with this jarring exclamation: "Happy shall he be, who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" (verse 9). "The consistent act of amnesia that has become part of the 'performance'

3 *Eretz Yisrael*, the land of Israel, has (and always has had) a crucial meaning for the Jewish people, as distinct from *medinat Yisrael*, the State of Israel: see below for the distinction.

4 Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

5 Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, "'By the Waters of Babylon:' The Amnesia of Memory," in *Psalms In/On Jerusalem*, ed. Hanna Pardes and Ophir Münz-Manor (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 153–164, at 159. See also Jeremy Schonfield, "Rethinking the Role of Territory in the Jewish Narrative," *Jewish Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2014): 12–15.

of this Psalm ...," warns Ezrahi, "must be addressed, urgently, in our time and place."[6] Though I do not discuss these verses directly, this chapter heeds her words: it addresses the problem of collective amnesia concerning Psalm 137.[7]

When Ezrahi refers to "our time and place," I take it she is speaking as both a Jew and an Israeli, living in the city that is the subject of the psalm, and which today is a primary site of (what is widely called) 'the Israeli-Palestinian conflict': the state of affairs to which her admonition alludes. I am not Israeli, but I share her sense of urgency and for the same reason, for Israel acts in the name of the Jewish people. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem," the psalmist writes, "let my right hand forget" (verse 5), "let my tongue cleave to my palate" (verse 6).[8] But, I ask myself, what does it mean *not* to forget Jerusalem? Do we remember Jerusalem when we forget Gaza—where 'Gaza' stands for the othering of the Palestinians and for their dispossession by Israel acting as a Jewish state?[9] The question could be put this way: The recollection of what Babylon *did* to us: what does that *do* to us? Taking my cue from Psalm 137, I shall use the first person, singular and plural, as I broach the question: What does it mean, in the here and now, to remember Zion?

Zion.[10] The moment the word is on our lips and the taste of it on our tongue, it bursts open, releasing a thousand impressions from memory, like Marcel Proust's madeleine; except that Zion lodges in the memory of a people, not an individual. Zion is ubiquitous in Jewish liturgy. "Open a Jewish daily prayer book used in any part of the world," writes Ephraim Mirvis, the current Chief Rabbi, "and Zionism will leap out at you."[11] Except that it will not. *Zion*

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6 Ezrahi, "'By the Waters of Babylon,'" 159.

7 I am grateful to Amos Goldberg for drawing my attention to Ezrahi's essay in the nick of time—as I was in the final stage of revising this text.

8 Translations usually attach a phrase, such as 'its cunning,' 'its function' or 'its skill' after 'let my right hand forget,' which is not in the Hebrew.

9 On the question of whether, or in what sense, Israel is a *Jewish* state, see two books by Yaacov Yadgar: *Israel's Jewish Identity Crisis: State and Politics in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) and *Sovereign Jews: Israel, Zionism, and Judaism* (New York: SUNY Press, 2017).

10 'Zion' in the Bible is another name for Jerusalem. It is also a synecdoche for the whole of the land of Israel. My primary focus is on Jerusalem per se.

11 Ephraim Mirvis, "Ken Livingstone and the Hard Left are Spreading the Insidious Virus of Anti-Semitism," *The Telegraph*, May 3, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/03/ken-livingstone-and-the-hard-left-are-spreading-the-insidious-vi/ (accessed August 5, 2020). Rabbi Mirvis' full title is Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. As such, he is the 'spiritual head' of the United Synagogue, an Orthodox denomination to which perhaps 50 percent of British Jews are affiliated. He has no official standing (other than as one rabbi among others) in the eyes of any other Jewish denomination, Orthodox or otherwise, though the general public

will leap out at you, not *Zionism*, not unless you first *add* the ism, creatively reading it into the text. In "Our Homeland, the Text," George Steiner defines a Jew as someone who "always has a pencil or pen in hand" when reading.[12] I am drawn to this definition, but I would like to rule out sleep-writing: writing with absence of mind. I think of the Jewish tradition of commentary as a form of *imitatio Dei*: just as God, in the opening chapter of Genesis, is in a state of absolute awareness when creating the world, so should the Jewish commentator be fully conscious of the work that she or he is doing when *re*creating the text in her or his commentary. The text is given; the role of the commentator is to suggest a take. Clearly, when Rabbi Mirvis describes Zionism as leaping out at you from any "Jewish daily prayer book," he does not think of this as a take; he thinks it is a given. It is as if we have no choice in the matter: Zionism lies in wait on the page, ready to leap out and grab us by the throat. He is unaware of the pen or pencil in his hand as he reads. His ink is invisible to him. He does not know he is spinning the text.[13] He thinks he is simply reporting what is there for all (who have eyes) to see.[14] Perhaps he thinks this because he is not alone. Many Jews today take his take for granted (though many others do not). Which prompts the question: What happens to our reception of the siddur (Jewish prayer book) or Tanakh (Hebrew scriptures) when we turn Zion into an ism? Are we recalling the texts thoughtfully or rewriting them absent-mindedly? If absent-minded, of whom are we oblivious? Whom do we forget? I am thinking, when I ask this, not only of the Palestinian Other. I am thinking also of the Jewish self.

Zionism is not just one thing. When I use the word here I mean, primarily and for the most part, *political* Zionism, the movement that was launched in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897 at the first Zionist Congress, which was convened and chaired by Theodor Herzl and based on *Der Judenstaat* or *The State of the*

(and even official bodies) tend to treat him as though he were a spokesman for *klal Yisrael* (the whole of Jewry), or at least the UK branch, or minimally all 'religious' Jews in the UK. On the office of Chief Rabbi, see Geoffrey Alderman, "The British Chief Rabbinate: a Most Peculiar Practice," in Geoffrey Alderman, *Controversy and Crisis: Studies in the History of the Jews in Modern Britain*, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), 83–110.

12 George Steiner, "Our Homeland, the Text," in George Steiner, *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978–1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 304–27, at 319.

13 His spin is quite *un*orthodox judged by traditional rabbinic commentary going back to the Talmud. See Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

14 This, in a way, is the essence of fundamentalism, which is not necessarily religious. I shall say more about this later.

Jews, the pamphlet he published the previous year.[15] Even political Zionism takes different forms, from left to right, from religious to secular (though I shall argue that the latter distinction is deceptive). There is, however, something like a core idea that most forms of political Zionism share. Formally, this idea is reflected in the Basic Law that the Knesset adopted on July 19, 2018. It calls the *land* of Israel (*eretz Yisrael*) "the historical homeland of the Jewish people" and describes the *state* of Israel (*medinat* Yisrael) as "the nation state of the Jewish people."[16] This core idea is modelled on the concept of a nation-state. But if it were merely a product of modern political thought, it would not be possible to explain why so many Jewish people find the idea compelling. It was fashioned in the crucible of history—in the collective experience of European Jews, as an internal Other, tolerated at best, persecuted at worst, never secure, pushed from pillar to post, from state to state: a history handed down from generation to generation. But history, and how the past is remembered, is only part of the story. The other part lies in scripture, liturgy and folklore around basic Jewish texts. These two sources feed into the core idea of Zionism and invest it with the emotional charge that the populist exploits.[17]

A song I remember from childhood is a case in point.[18] It is almost a psalm. The song, "Vu Ahin Soll Ich Geh'n?" ("Where Can I Go?"), was recorded by Leo Fuld, 'the King of Yiddish Music,' in April 1949, less than a year after the State of Israel came into existence.[19] But it was written in captivity, so to speak: Igor Korntayer, who wrote the original Yiddish lyrics, was a Polish Jew who perished in Auschwitz in or around 1941. We frequently played the record, an old 78 rpm,

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15 Title usually translated as *The Jewish State*. Subtitled *An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*. For a very different approach to Zionism, see *Words of Fire: Selected Essays of Ahad Ha'am*, ed. Brian Klug (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2015).

16 Adopted 19 July 2018. Translation as in the version in English posted on the Knesset website, available at https://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/BasicLawNationState.pdf (accessed August 5, 2020).

17 The relationship between these twin sources is discussed by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in his modern classic *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).

18 The discussion of this song is adapted from my essay "A Time to Speak Out: Rethinking Jewish Identity and Solidarity with Israel," *Jewish Quarterly*, 49, no. 4 (2002–3): 35–36, and chapter one of my book *Being Jewish and Doing Justice: Bringing Argument to Life* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2011), 21–22.

19 English lyrics by Leo Fuld and Sonny Miller. Music by the Jewish composer Oscar Strock. "When performing in Paris, Fuld visited a little Yiddish night club where he heard a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto sing a song which touched him deeply: 'Vu ahin zol ikh geyn?'. He was so impressed that he wanted to record his own version:" https://secondhandsongs.com/work/160316 (accessed August 5, 2020). These facts deepen the poignancy of the song.

at our North London home, in the 1950s. My mother would sing it with feeling, as if its questions were hers and its answer an answer to her prayers. To the best of my recollection, the English version of the first stanza was as follows:

> Tell me: Where can I go?
> There's no place I can see.
> Where to go, where to go?
> Every door is closed to me.
> To the left, to the right,
> It's the same in every land.
> There is nowhere to go
> And it's me who should know,
> Won't you please understand?

This stanza expresses collective despair, alluding to Jewish displacement "in every land:" the inherited memory of never belonging, not fully, not really; of always being as alien as the exiles who wept by the waters of Babylon. But if the song opens with the question, "Where can I go?", the second stanza gives a resoundingly hopeful and confident answer:

> Now I know where to go,
> Where my folk proudly stand.
> Let me go, let me go
> To that precious promised land.
> No more left no more right.
> Lift your head and see the light.
> I am proud, can't you see,
> For at last I am free:
> No more wandering for me.

The first stanza could almost be a reprise of Psalm 137. Its nine lines recall the nine verses of the psalm. Then, as if by a miracle, in the second stanza the lament turns into a song of joy worthy of Miriam chanting with timbrel in hand by the shores of the Red Sea (Exod. 15.20–21). These lyrics blend two kinds of collective memory, historical and scriptural, into one stream of consciousness. Without ever mentioning God, Egypt or the Children of Israel, the sequence of the stanzas parallels the basic structure of the narrative in the Five Books of Moses from Exodus to Deuteronomy: wandering followed by the prospect of deliverance. (In "Let me go, let me go" there is an echo of "Let my people go" [Exod. 9.1].) This is the inner rhythm of the word 'Zion.' These

are the associations that explode in our minds when the word is on our lips. I cannot tell you how compelling this was for me as a child—for *me* and for *we*. When this is how Zionism is narrated, then it is true what Rabbi Mirvis says: it does seem to "leap out at you" from the pages of a prayer book.

Zakhor! Remember! Thus *am Yisrael*, the people of Israel, is exhorted, over and again, in the Tanakh.[20] What happens to this divine imperative when it is nationalized? This is the question, of whose urgency Ezrahi reminds us. Asking this question will bring to mind the 'forgotten' verses at the end of psalm 137.

2 Recalling Reality

To bring us down to earth with a jolt, consider the controversy over the political status of Jerusalem. On December 6, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted: "I have determined that it is time to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel." He added: "I am also directing the State Department to begin preparation to move the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem."[21] Later that day, repeating this decision in a speech at the White House, he remarked: "This is nothing more, or less, than a recognition of reality."[22]

A claim to recognize reality demands a reality check, starting with July 30, 1980, when the Knesset decreed that Jerusalem "complete and united" is "the capital of Israel."[23] This unilateral declaration flew in the face of certain facts. Since the end of the British Mandate in Palestine in May 1948, the legal and political status of Jerusalem have been contested; other states have rejected Israel's claim to the entire city as an integral part of its territory; neither the United Nations (UN) nor any other intergovernmental body has accepted that East Jerusalem is within Israel's borders; and, in the eyes of the world, Israel remains in illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, which includes East Jerusalem.[24] Accordingly, the question of the status of the city belongs, along with

20 Harold Bloom, "Foreword," in Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, xiii–xxv at xiii.

21 Tweet available at https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/938517073508163584?lang=en (accessed August 5, 2020).

22 Speech available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-trump-jerusalem/ (accessed August 5, 2020).

23 Available on the website of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfa-archive/1980-1989/pages/basic%20law-%20jerusalem-%20capital%20of%20israel.aspx (accessed August 5, 2020).

24 See Bernard Wasserstein, "Trump's Jerusalem Embassy Move: A Busted Flush?," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/04/trumps-jerusalem-embassy-move-a-busted-flush/ (accessed August 5, 2020).

other 'final status' questions, squarely on the negotiating table. This is the reality. So, which reality exactly did Trump recognize? Clearly, not the one I have just recalled. In reality, his reality was no reality. It was no more real than the scenarios in which he laid down the law in *The Apprentice*.

In itself, however, his announcement was all *too* real, and affected the political reality on the ground in Israel, where, unsurprisingly, it was generally welcomed across the political spectrum.[25] But there is more to this than meets the eye. Trump's announcement struck a chord deeper than mere political reality. Take, for example, the speech by Danny Danon, Israel's ambassador to the UN, following Trump's announcement. Danon said that the US had "simply stated a fact" in recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. [26] Thus far, he merely did with the word 'fact' what Trump did with the word 'reality:' he stretched the truth. But then he added: "Jerusalem is the holiest place on earth for the Jewish people," calling this "a fact that simply cannot be refuted." He continued: "King David declared Jerusalem the capital of the Jewish people 3,000 years ago." Is that a fact? Daniel Carmon, Israel's ambassador to India, outbid Danny Danon, saying: "It is a fact that Jerusalem has been the capital of the Jewish people for five thousand years."[27] Considering that, according to the Jewish calendar, this would have been only 778 years after the world was created, that is a truly astounding fact, as facts go. But which is it? 3,000 years or 5,000? Well, let us not quibble over a mere couple of millennia. The 'fact' on which Danon and Carmon (and countless others) agree is this: Jerusalem is "the capital of the Jewish people" and has been since time immemorial.

But, in fact, this fact is no fact. If there were a fact lurking under the surface, it would be a fact about the content of certain biblical books—Samuel, Kings and Chronicles—where the saga of King David is told. Even then, the biblical story gives no succor to the idea that the united kingdom which David established lasted any length of time. After his grandson Rehoboam ascended the throne sixty or so years later (according to the biblical story), the kingdom

25 The legal reality, however, is unchanged. See Victor Kattan, "Why U.S. Recognition of Jerusalem Could Be Contrary to International Law," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 47, no. 3 (2018): 72–92.

26 "UN General Assembly Rejects US Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 21, 2017, https://www.jta.org/2017/12/21/israel/un-general-assembly-passes-resolution-rejecting-recognition-of-jerusalem-as-israels-capital (accessed August 5, 2020).

27 "Jerusalem Has Been the Capital of Jewish Community for 5000 Years, Says Israeli Ambassador to India," *Indian Express*, December 17, 2017, https://indianexpress.com/article/world/jerusalem-has-been-the-capital-of-the-jewish-community-for-5000-years-says-israeli-ambassador-to-india-4986940/ (accessed August 5, 2020).

split into two, north and south; and that was that. That was the end of David's united kingdom from that day to this. In any case, biblical books are not historical works, not even if some historical events are reflected in them. Their bearing on the political status of Jerusalem today is, to put it mildly, dubious—as dubious as the bearing of Homer's *Iliad* on the political status of the city of Hisarlik (once known as Troy). Furthermore, it makes no sense to speak about Jerusalem as "the capital of the Jewish people." Peoples do not have capitals; states do. In short, this so-called fact is a fantasy.

But it is a *public* fantasy—not merely because it is widely shared, but because all the so-called facts that I have just rehearsed form part of a populist narrative which creates 'the people,' the real or true people to whom the State of Israel supposedly belongs, conflating them with the global Jewish people. All populisms are public fantasies. This one is the fantasy underpinned by political Zionism, the one Trump reinforced when he recognized Jerusalem "as the capital of Israel." The resonance of his declaration went deeper than reality, deep into the fantastic depths where fantastic so-called facts, like the ones claimed by Danon and Carmon, are fashioned.[28] This is because the city in question was not Tel Aviv or Haifa, but Jerusalem. Jerusalem—Zion—looms much larger than fact in the imagination of Judaism. It lies on a plane higher than reality.[29]

3 Reclaiming Poetry

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Why Jerusalem?" This is the title of a poem by Yehuda Amichai, the Israeli poet.[30] To put his question in a form that is familiar from the Haggadah: Why is this city different from all other cities? "Why, of all places, Jerusalem?" asks Amichai, with a hint of exasperation. He enquires playfully: "Why not New York / with her buildings on high and burrows down below / and tunnels and lower depths from which to call out: / O Lord, out of the

28 From the same fantastic depths came this rhetorical question: "Would it be too much to pray for a day when the Bible gets a 'Book of Trump,' much like it has a 'Book of Esther' …?" (Miriam Adelson, "A Time of Miracles," *Israel HaYom*, June 27, 2019, https://www.israelhayom.com/2019/06/27/a-time-of-miracles/ [accessed August 5, 2020])

29 Much the same might be said about Christianity and about Islam, but each case is different and it is the Jewish case that I am discussing.

30 Yehuda Amichai, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Why Jerusalem?," in *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, ed. Robert Alter (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 500–509. I am grateful to David Nelken for drawing my attention to Amichai's poems on Jerusalem.

depths have I cried unto thee."[31] This is a prospect so daft that I could not resist quoting it; and, of course, the bathos is the point. As the poem progresses, he contemplates one city after another, wondering, over 28 stanzas, "Why not?", repeatedly asking: "Why Jerusalem?" Here is a sample:[32] Why not "Petersburg with the mystery / of her white nights"? "Why not Rome with her catacombs," "Vancouver with her salmon," "London / with its gardens and palaces and towers and the chiming / from the top of Big Ben …"? "Why Jerusalem?", he persists. "Why not the sublime San Francisco?" And again: "Why Jerusalem, why not Paris with her squares / and boulevards?" The questioning continues in this vein, until, recalling a moment in time (or perhaps out of time), he ends on a wing and a prayer: "Once I stood at the Western Wall / when suddenly a flock of startled birds soared up, / shrieking and flapping their wings like bits of paper / with wishes scribbled on them, wishes / that flew out from between the massive stones / and ascended on high."[33] Closing with this astonishing vision of an event that is at once natural and supernatural, Amichai is either reminding us why he asks "Why Jerusalem?" or he is giving us the answer—'*This* is why Jerusalem'—or he is abandoning the question, swept off his feet by this unaccountable outburst of birds, as much as to say: 'This just *is* Jerusalem. Don't ask.'

I see his poem as being in a poetic tradition that goes back to the psalmist and the Hebrew prophets.[34] Jerusalem or Zion is the place of which Isaiah speaks when, voicing his vision of "the last days," he declares: "out of Zion shall go forth the Torah and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Is. 2: 2–3). Isaiah speaks as a prophet and these place names are terms of his art. So too with the psalmist who conjures up the scene of lamentation "by the waters of Babylon." To be clear about what I am saying: the Jerusalem of the psalms and the prophets is not imaginary: it is a real place: it is reality raised by their imagination and by their poetry to a higher power: higher than fact. Their Zion lies on the horizon where heaven and earth appear to meet. Or, as Amichai puts it in another of his poems: "Jerusalem is a port city on the shore of eternity."[35] Isaiah

31 Amichai, "Jerusalem," 502–503.

32 Amichai, "Jerusalem," 503, 504, 505, 508.

33 Amichai, "Jerusalem," 509.

34 This is not to suggest that the authors of the prophetic books of the Tanakh took themselves to be writing poetry rather than, say, making a political intervention (a distinction that, in any case, seems anachronistic). When I refer to their writing as poetry I am not making a point, as a scholar, about their genre *as written*. I am speaking, as a Jew, of their status *as received*. The difference this makes to reading the texts is radical, but to develop the point further lies beyond the scope of this essay. I am grateful to Lev Taylor for alerting me to the need to register this point.

35 Alter, *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, 88.

would not have been ashamed to have written this line. Nor am I embarrassed to quote it admiringly in an essay critiquing the role played in political Zionism by a Jewish poetic tradition. For it is not the poetry per se that distorts political thinking about Palestine and Israel. It is the *petrification* of poetry into political ideology: *that* is the problem.

Let me illustrate the point with the words of a former Prime Minister of Israel who was also once mayor of Jerusalem. At the 35th World Zionist Congress in June 2006, which met in Jerusalem, Ehud Olmert welcomed the delegates to the city, which he described this way: "Jerusalem, which is Zion, the beating heart, and the object of yearning and prayers of the Jewish people for generations."[36] Recalling the first Zionist congress in 1897, he went on to say: "There is a straight line between Basel and Jerusalem, the line of political Zionism, whose aim was the return of the Jewish people to the stage of history as an independent and sovereign nation."[37] *There* is the problem. Olmert, like Mirvis, elides the difference between Zion and Zionism. But what becomes of Zion, "the beating heart" of the Jewish people, when it is physically possessed and no longer an "object of yearning"? When it is taken by military force? When it is transformed from poetic trope to capital city, "the capital city of the Jewish people"? Ezrahi gives the answer to this question: "When this poetic image [Zion] denies its status as poetry, it makes such claims on the political imagination that the 'final status' of Jerusalem becomes non-negotiable."[38] Zion, the "beating heart" of the people, atrophies into a trophy, which must not, at any cost—whether to the Palestinians or anyone else—be surrendered.

So, it is not poetry as such that is the problem. The problem is forgetting that poetry is poetry—not political ideology written in flowery language. If we forget this, what becomes of our minds, our hearts? Unlike Pharaoh, whose heart was hardened by God against the Children of Israel (Exod. 9.12), we do not need divine assistance: we harden our own hearts against the Palestinians by forgetting that our poetic heritage is poetic: forgetting it, in other words, *even as we remember it*: forgetting the very thing that we remember.

What I am saying can be put this way: political Zionism is a form of fundamentalism. But I need to clarify how I am using this term. To begin with, I am not suggesting that either the movement or the credo is essentially

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36 Quoted in my essay "The State of Zionism," *The Nation*, 284, no. 24 (June 18, 2007): 23, from which portions of this section of the chapter are adapted. See also Klug, *Being Jewish and Doing Justice*, 147–157.

37 Klug, "The State of Zionism," 23.

38 Sidra DeKoven and Ezrahi, *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 238.

religious. Although there are varieties of Zionism that describe themselves this way, most leading Zionist thinkers, as it happens, have thought of Zionism as secular. Ultimately, however, the distinction is not all that distinct. It never *was*, except perhaps on the sterilized margins of the movement. Zionism has always been haunted by the messianic hope—the hope of redemption and return—that is at the heart of the Hebrew scriptures. *Political* Zionism saw itself as secularizing that hope: wresting it away from heaven, taking it out of God's hands and putting it into human hands: Jewish but not rabbinic. True, as Arthur Hertzberg points out, "modern Zionist ideology" set out to give a "radically new meaning" to the ancient rumor of the Messiah; in this sense it is certainly not fundamentalist in the usual meaning of that word.[39] But, as Jacqueline Rose puts it in *The Question of Zion*, "messianism colors Zionism, including secular Zionism, at every turn."[40] She calls it eloquently "the answer to a secular prayer."[41] In this vein, the Israeli author David Grossman, speaking at the memorial for Yitzchak Rabin in 2006, said: "I am totally secular, and yet in my eyes the establishment and the very existence of the State of Israel is a miracle of sorts."[42] A miracle of sorts in answer to a prayer of sorts: this is the hold of political Zionism over the hearts of its adherents, even if they never remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (Exod. 20:8). The Israeli historian Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin wryly sums up the position of 'secular' Zionism with this paradox: "God does not exist but he promised the land to us."[43] Hertzberg observes: "The very name of the movement [Zionism] evoked the dream of an end of days, of an ultimate release from the exile and a coming to rest in the land of Jewry's heroic age."[44] It is likewise, as Rose remarks, with "the very name of the nation:" Israel.[45]

Not names alone. The political vocabulary of Zionism reverberates with sounds from Jewish liturgy. So, for example, Ben-Gurion declared in 1944: The "goal of our revolution *is the complete ingathering of the exiles into a socialist*

39 Arthur Hertzberg, "Introduction," in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 15–100, at 17.

40 Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 28.

41 Rose, *The Question of Zion*, 55.

42 "David Grossman's Speech at the Rabin Memorial," *Haaretz*, November 6, 2006. Available on the website of the International Middle East Media Center at http://imemc.org/article/22482/ (accessed August 5, 2020).

43 "Interview Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin," *Qantara*, August 13, 2004, https://en.qantara.de/content/interview-amnon-raz-krakotzkin-i-feel-responsible-for-the-victims-of-zionism (accessed August 5, 2020).

44 Hertzberg, "Introduction," 16.

45 Rose, *The Question of Zion*, 34.

Jewish state."[46] You could almost hear 'revelation' for 'revolution.' The distinction between the two words is not distinct because it is dissolved in the solvent of the messianic phrase "ingathering of the exiles." Five years later, speaking now as Prime Minister, Ben-Gurion wrote Psalm 137 into the Zionist script of the state: "A nation which, for two thousand and five hundred years, has faithfully adhered to the vow made by the first exiles by the waters of Babylon not to forget Jerusalem, will never agree to be separated from Jerusalem."[47] A week later he averred that "for the State of Israel there has always been and there always will be one capital only—Jerusalem the Eternal. Thus it was 3,000 years ago—and thus it will be, we believe, until the end of time."[48] Thus spoke the socialist Ben-Gurion in 1949, and, to this day, a disembodied voice—the collective voice, as it were, of the people—continues to intone the same mantra, on the left, on the right, uniting the ungodly and the pious. "Jerusalem the Eternal," "until the end of time": who speaks like this outside the enchanted haven of poetry? It is not exactly the vernacular of the secular. It is a hybrid language in which poetry is stretched on the rack of ideology and ironed out. Flattened. It is this flattening of language—reducing poetry to politics—that I call 'fundamentalist.' The populist potential of biblical and liturgical texts resides in this process of flattening.[49] What Ben-Gurion might have seen as 'remembering Zion'—writing Psalm 137 into the Zionist script of the state—I see as a mean trick of memory played on Jerusalem, "the beating heart" (Olmert) of the Jewish people.

From 1948 to 1967 this 'beating heart' was physically bisected: East was Arab, West was Jewish. Then, at the end of the June war, the two halves were, in a manner of speaking, reunited: Israel annexed the eastern sector.[50] In another of his Jerusalem poems, Amichai calls 1967 "the Year of Forgetting."[51] Why, I

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46 David Ben-Gurion, "The Imperatives of the Jewish Revolution," in *The Zionist Idea*, 606–620, at 618 (emphasis in the original).

47 December 5, 1949. Full statement available on the website of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs at http://www.jcpa.org/art/knesset4.htm (accessed August 5, 2020).

48 December 13, 1949. Full statement available on the website of the Jewish Virtual Library at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/prime-minister-ben-gurion-on-jerusalem (accessed August 5, 2020).

49 This account of fundamentalism needs elaboration, but to develop it further would go beyond the scope of this chapter. For a somewhat different use of 'fundamentalism' in its relationship to populism, see Thomas Lynch, "'Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you': Populism, Political Theology, and the Culturally Repugnant Other," in this volume.

50 Karen Armstrong, *A History of Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (London: HarperCollins, 1986), 403. I believe the term used in the legal Ordinance was "unification" and not "annexation."

51 Alter, *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, 83.

am not sure. I cannot tell from the poem itself whether this epithet should be taken at face value, possibly meaning that it was the year for putting all the troubles of the past behind us, or whether he was being ironic; for 1967 was the year of remembering with a vengeance. The floodgates of Jewish memory opened and a torrent from the past poured through (like the Red Sea after the Children of Israel had passed safely between its shores), submerging the Palestinian presence in the land. East Jerusalem with the Temple Mount fell into Israeli hands, and old biblical names—Judea, Samaria, Hebron, Shechem—sprang from ecstatic lips. I remember it well, for I too was caught up for a while in the mass euphoria, a kind of collective high. For a while, I forgot myself.

In her epic book on Jerusalem, Karen Armstrong brings that intoxicating moment to mind. "Religious Jews," she writes, "were convinced that the Redemption had begun." [52] Thus, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook "announced that 'under heavenly command' the Jewish people 'have just returned home in the elevations of holiness and our own holy city.'" But, as she makes clear, it was not only the religious. Moshe Dayan, "an avowed secularist," stood before the Western Wall and declared, "We have returned to our most holy places; we have returned and we shall never leave them."[53] Even the urbane Abba Eban, Israel's delegate to the UN, waxed prophetic. Jerusalem, he said, "lies beyond and above, before and after, all political and secular considerations"[54]—as if he were talking about the transcendent itself, *el elyon*, God on high. Levi Eshkol, the Prime Minister, announced that Jerusalem was "the eternal capital of Israel."[55] And on the night of Saturday 10 June, in this "holy city" that "lies beyond and above" the mundane, "the 619 [Palestinian] inhabitants of the Maghribi Quarter were given three hours to evacuate their homes."[56] Then the mechanical caterpillars moved in, reducing the district to rubble.[57] This was done to create a plaza to accommodate Jewish pilgrims to the Western Wall. That was the official—purely pragmatic—reason. But if you looked closely, peering at the reality through the lens of scriptural poetry, you could see the Messiah entering Jerusalem, riding on the back of a bulldozer rather than the donkey in the vision of the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 9:9). We live in the end time, when the bulldozers, "under heavenly command," do not cease from doing their divine work: manufacturing rubble from Palestinian homes.

52 Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 400.
53 Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 400.
54 Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 402.
55 Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 402.
56 Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 402.
57 Armstrong, *Jerusalem*, 402–403.

What is Jerusalem? Where is Jerusalem? "A port city on the shore of eternity." What sort of politics results from remembering a place that is at once terrestrial and celestial? Actually, there is more than one possible answer to this question. But the answer that has prevailed so far is a politics of dispossession and exclusion in the name of the Jewish people. Such are the hazards of remembering Jerusalem. It means risking forgetting the past from which the people originally emerged, the past of which Moses reminds the people when he says: "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 23:9). According to a *baraita* (a late tradition) in the Talmud, this imperative is repeated in the Torah between thirty-six and forty-six times (depending on how you count).[58] How many times does it need to be said? And how hard is it to translate into an imperative that applies today? It is not that difficult. Let me try my hand at it: "You shall not turn another people into the Other, for you know the feelings of the Other, having yourselves been Othered in the land of Europe."

The memory of otherness, and the concomitant feeling for the stranger: this is the antidote to the populist misuse of biblical and liturgical texts, like Psalm 137. This memory is the rock on which Zion is built in the topography of Judaism. A Jewish state that is built on any other foundation is built on "alien land," irrespective of its map coordinates. A nation that fails to remember this but calls itself Jewish forgets itself. When I contemplate this collective self-forgetting, I wonder whether an entire people—*my* people—are not suffering from the dreaded Jerusalem Syndrome: that mysterious condition that deprives the sanest of people of their grip on reality; so intoxicating is the taste of Zion.[59] I imagine Isaiah turning in his grave, desperate to deliver a flea in the ear of his people once more. And the psalmist, I fancy, with pen in hand, is rewriting verse 5 of Psalm 137, bringing it up to date: "If only we could forget you, O Jerusalem," she or he laments, "if only. Then maybe we might be able to remember you."

58 *The Talmud: A Selection*, ed. Rabbi Dr Norman Solomon (London: Penguin, 2009), 472.

59 Leah Abramowitz, "Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Syndrome", *Jewish Virtual Library*, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-jerusalem-syndrome (accessed August 5, 2020).

CHAPTER 9

Populism, Christianity, and the Role of the Theologian

Mattias Martinson

We experience climate change. And not only *one* climate change—not only the one pertaining to the Earth—but also a *spiritual* climate change. This second climate change shows signs of having utterly destructive and disastrous consequences, just like the first. Christianity plays a pivotal role in this climate threat. As Christianity looks now, in its ambiguous secularized contemporary European shape, it does not seldom return to the political center in order to represent the European insider in contrast to the outsider, the migrant, the Muslim intruder. In my view, the only reason for continuing to work as a theologian under the conditions of this threat is the obligation to counter this tendency stubbornly by reclaiming other understandings of Christianity in constructive relations to other faith traditions and to secular life. In face of populist xenophobia, academic theology must facilitate a vision of European Christian life as a life in solidarity with the other and thus contribute to a solution to our spiritual climate crisis.

What is this new crisis about? In the history of Europe, Christianity has been used repeatedly as a weapon against non-Christians, heretics, and minorities. The development of Christianity over two thousand years is full of examples of political uses and abuses of confessional identities and religious authorities. And yet, I would argue that the aggressive political right-wing use of Christianity in our time is somewhat different. It is not so much a question of utilizing ecclesial authority for a specific political end, which has been characteristic for the Christian history of Europe, but more like a 'post-Christian' political manifestation of certain cultural aspects of the Christian heritage.[1] Ordinary theological and spiritual questions are pushed into the background, while issues concerning Christian cultural identities come to the fore. A rather abstract idea of historical Christianity has been used by right-wing populists

1 I will return to the notion of the post-Christian below. For a related discussion, see Mattias Martinson, "Towards a 'Theology' of Christian Monumentality. Post-Christian Reflections on Nature and Grace," in *Monument and Memory*, ed. Jonna Bornemark, Mattias Martinson, and Jayne Svenungsson (Berlin: LIT, 2015), 21–42.

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to present national identities and protectionist values as something beyond negotiation. Such a 'post-Christian' use of Christianity has been called "Christianism" (analogous to 'Islamism').[2] Like Ulrich Schmiedel in his introduction to this volume, I am not sure if "Christianism" is the best of labels, and I will not use it myself, but it is at least an interesting concept as far as it does not immediately refer to Christianity in general, but to Christianity conceived of as a fossilized cultural heritage, charged with a particular energy that helps it to function ideologically and politically.[3] However, this fossilized Christianity is not simply an empty abstraction, but appears to correspond to the actual superficiality of lived Christianity in today's Europe: churches' unbearable obsession with moral and especially sexual issues, on the one hand, and their lack of appeal to new generations, on the other. In short, since fewer and fewer people actually care about the central ideas of the Christian faith, the establishment of a shallow but monumental version of Christianity becomes convenient to negotiate with.

In this chapter, I address the notion of populism in relation to such a post-Christian understanding of European Christianity in order to show how it presently works as a force mainly against the Muslims of Europe, as it reproduces and reinforces the old image of Muslims as the religious others of Christian European nations. And, perhaps more importantly, I discuss what this might mean for contemporary European academic theologians working in secular university departments, being part both of the contemporary understanding of academia and of an old Christian tradition where dominating forms of Christianity have had a profoundly organic relation to the social or national public discourse.

What is a meaningful public role today for an academic theologian? I will not be able to answer that question in a conclusive way, but I will offer a series of provocations. Historically speaking, however, both before and after the European Enlightenment, the public theologian has most often been identified as a *Christian* voice, even though it has been very common to understand the theologian as a public intellectual with a wider task than just speaking to the church. The development of secular institutions has of course changed

2 See Rogers Brubaker, "A New 'Christianist' Secularism in Europe," *The Immanent Frame*, October 11, 2016, https://tif.ssrc.org/2016/10/11/a-new-christianist-secularism-in-europe/ (accessed June 29, 2020), and Ben Ryan, "Christianism: A crude political ideology and the triumph of empty symbolism," *Theos*, November 5, 2018, https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2018/11/05/christianism-a-crude-political-ideology-and-the-triumph-of-empty-symbolism (accessed June 29, 2020).

3 Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Populist Spirit – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

the way of speaking theologically. David Tracy's famous notion of the theologian speaking to three publics, the church, the academy, and society at large, is typical of this development.[4] His view is emblematic for a situation where the secular has been negotiated with a certain cultural form of Christianity, as in many European national contexts. We can call Tracy's understanding of the situation for the public theologian a 'Christian situation.' In my view, such a Christian situation is long gone and, therefore, theology must find ways to develop itself to become truly significant for a *post-Christian* public situation in which ordinary Christians are all included, also in view of contemporary populism and nationalism.

However, in order to offer some examples from our present post-Christian situation, I will start elsewhere. My first move will be a brief reflection on the notion of populism. Then I will offer examples that are only implicitly addressing theological problems, before then turning to more explicit examples of how populism and Christianity join hands.

1 A Definition of Populism

What is populism? I lean towards a definition of populism that has to do, first, with *the elite challenging other elites*. Second, it carries some given ideological content, even if vague. I am thus somewhat skeptical about completely formal understandings of populism that claim that the phenomenon can be found in every ideological context.[5] The reason for this is that the category of 'the people' is at the center. Populism has its ideological foundation in the political interest of an imagined *people*, above the particular interests of individuals or groups. 'The people' can of course be defined in many ways, but historically speaking, we know that the notion of 'people,' *Volk*, has often been described

4 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM, 1981), 3–31.

5 I say this, although my main source for defining populism, Cas Mudde, argues that populism is a "thin-centered ideology" which can merge with ideologies from the left to the right. See Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–563, at 544. My argument against Mudde on this particular point is that the concept of ideological content in itself becomes blurred if a strong-centered ideology like communism, with its dominant class-perspective, is said to go well together with a thin-centered ideology of the people. Communism may well have its own forms of demagogy and opportunism, but I am not comfortable to call it populism in the way discussed here. Instead, I approach populism as a thin-centered ideology merging with other thin-centered ideological outlooks, such as nationalism, scientism, atheism, and secularism.

as a homogeneous entity in terms of ethnicity as well as national and religious belonging which has a certain historical purpose. Hence, it is not very apt to use 'populism' in a left-wing context, where the political interest is tied closely not to the people, but to a particular class-experience or the experience of vulnerable groups. Populism is more likely to be found in connection to conservative political agendas. That said, too strong an emphasis on the substantial aspect of the notion is problematic. There are examples of substantial definitions of populism identifying populism completely with right-wing and nationalist commitments, which is too simplified as well.

Against this background, following Cas Mudde in his important article "The Populist Zeitgeist," I opt for a definition that focuses on 'the people' as an ideological starting point, but ends in a less clear ideology: populists claim *to be on par with the people and the peoples' interest, where the peoples' interest is understood as a graspable common will*. We could call this 'People-centrism.' But this is not enough of course, there is more to populism. Another important aspect is: populists claim *to put the interest of the people against a corrupt ruling elite which works against the peoples' interest*. This aspect of "anti-elitism" gives populism its relative ideological flexibility.[6]

A working definition of populism can thus be built on the three legs of 'elitist discourse,' 'people-centrism,' and 'anti-elitism.' Populism is the elite practice of displaying one's closeness to the people by showing that one is part of the people, listens to the people, and is not alienated from the people, while at the same time attacking other elites for neither knowing, nor bothering with, the issues that people care about.[7]

2 Populism and Christianity in the Swedish Debate

What then is the explicit relation between contemporary populism and Christianity? In order to illustrate this without immediately moving into extremist right-wing examples, I will refer to an article in which two unlikely allies—an atheistic humanist and a minister of the Church of Sweden—argue together: "In the world's most secular country, there is a strong suspicion against any criticism of religion... No matter how paradoxical this may seem, this kind of climate is typical of the Swedish debate. But it would be very unfortunate if such trenches were to be kept between those who believe in God and those

6 Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 543.

7 See Stefaan Walgrave, "Populism," in *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, vol. 3, ed. Cianpietro Mazzoleni (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 1201–1208.

who do not, *as the essential dividing line rather goes between those who want to see a society built on humanist and secular ground and those who do not.*"[8]

We have to be very careful here. What happens in this citation is that an atheist humanist and an established Christian minister jointly complain about the spirit of the times, which has made it more difficult and uncomfortable to criticize religion. The pretext to this is that Sweden has been highly secularized for many decades, and that Christianity was severely criticized during the second half of the twentieth century by influential secularists, Richard-Dawkins-like figures. So at least part of the Swedish intellectual tradition from the twentieth century includes a relatively strong modernist suspicion of clerical influence and public religiosity.[9]

As in many other European contexts, this type of public anti-clericalism has been somewhat undermined in the last decades by the fact that migration has brought with itself *different* forms of public religion. It has been the experience of many critics of religion that it is now difficult to handle problems relating to Islam on exactly the same critical premises as before, when a Christian state church dominated the scene completely and religion was more or less equated with Christianity. The two authors of the article start by lamenting this situation: It is no longer *as* easy to dismiss *uncomfortable* forms of religion as it once was.

Their next move, however, is even more interesting, since they now describe a situation of "trenches" between people who want to allow for what they see as a *sound* criticism of religion and those who do not. Taken separately, the authors do represent opposite sides in the debate about religion, namely the atheist's side and the believer's side, but still, they are now in the *same* trench when it comes to allow for the criticism of religion. Their common clue becomes quite clear: *together, as atheist and believer, they both want to secure a public square where one is allowed to question religious beliefs and practices that are understood as incompatible with secularism, liberalism, and humanism*.

Religious outlooks that challenge the Swedish people and the secular state that frames its life are thus threatening and dangerous for both, and so are the intellectuals who defend the right of many religious outlooks to coexist in the public square. Their common conclusion in favor of traditional Swedish

8 Annika Borg and Christer Sturmark, "Kyrkan måste sluta fred med religionskritikerna," *Dagens Nyheter*, September 10, 2011, 4. Unless stated otherwise, all translations from the Swedish are my own.

9 See Mattias Martinson, "Atheism as Culture and Condition: Nietzschean Reflections on the Contemporary Invisibility of Profound Groundlessness," *Approaching Religion* 2, no. 1 (2012): 75–86.

religion becomes both surprising and yet consistent with what they have argued before: "The normative and moral content of The Swedish Humanist Association more or less coincides with the normative and moral content of the Church of Sweden."[10]

The populist gesture is somewhat hidden in this example, but it can be made explicit. *People-centrism* is communicated through the appeal to a clear-cut *Swedish* public interest, the normative and moral content of the secular state. This is threatened by the "strong suspicion against any criticism of religion," which takes us to the *anti-elitism*, since it pits itself against the elite of influential politicians, journalists, academic voices, and church leaders who uphold the spirit of political correctness in view of 'strange' religious practices. All of this is voiced from the perspective of the *sound* elite, who understands the public interest in this threatening situation.

This is a typical example of how Christianity is utilized in contemporary populist discourse. And it is typical of what I have called a post-Christian understanding of Christianity. We have to deal here with a discourse where the question of whether one is or is not a Christian *believer* is more or less unimportant. The Church is morally on par with the atheists, and in this sense the two become the alternative, insightful elite that may overthrow the cunning elite. The norm is to keep as close as possible to the religious habits tied to the Swedish cultural heritage, and thus intertwined with core values of today's secular Sweden. As a living phenomenon, religion is condemned as soon as it deviates from this norm.

This side of the populist utilization of Christianity can also be illustrated by an example from the party program of the Sweden Democrats. The Sweden Democrats are a Swedish extremist right-wing party, which gained just a little less than 18 percent of the Swedish votes in the last election.[11] Their program states: "The Sweden Democrats view the government and the development of the Church of Sweden as a matter for all Swedes. Believers as well as non-believers."[12]

What are the reasons for this statement? At the surface, they appear to be different from the arguments made by the atheist and the Christian minister in my previous example. The Sweden Democrats claim: "Church of Sweden and

10 Borg and Sturmark, "Kyrkan måste sluta fred med religionskritikerna," 4.

11 The Swedish parliamentary election results from 2018 are listed on the following page: https://www.val.se/servicelankar/other-languages/english-engelska/election-results/election-results-2018.html (accessed October 1, 2020).

12 Sverigedemokraterna, "Trygghet och tradition," https://sd.se/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/kyrkomanifest.pdf (accessed November 8, 2017).

Christianity are indissolubly interwoven with the culture and history of our country. Because of the significance of the Church of Sweden in the creation of our Swedish identity … it can and should *not* be put on equal terms with any other religious denomination in our country."[13] "These circumstances are the fundamental reason for the Sweden Democrat's engagement with Church politics. … [W]e work to strengthen the Church's and Christianity's exceptional position in Swedish society."[14]

This is of course an explicitly nationalist and ethnocentric statement. But how different is it compared to the previous example, where the Church of Sweden was marshalled to strengthen the Swedish form of secularism and humanism? Of course, it moves along different ideological lines, since it explicitly prescribes an exceptional *religious* position for the Church of Sweden. But how far is this from the post-Christian argument that secular atheism and the Church of Sweden share the same normative and moral content?

In the Sweden Democrats' party program we are left in no doubt about why this discussion about the Church of Sweden and Christianity is important in the first place: "According to the Sweden Democrats' opinion, Islam and especially its political and fundamentalist branch, is the religious view that has the single most difficulties in co-existing with Swedish and the Western culture."[15] "The influence of Islamism on Swedish society should be resisted, and migration from Muslim countries with a strong fundamentalist heritage should be strongly limited."[16]

I presented these two different examples *together* in order to illustrate that this is indeed a nationalist and extremist form of populism in which Christianity becomes important. It is crucial to show that such a utilization of national Christianity is not limited to extremist right-wing parties or groups; it is from time to time also present in secular democratic humanism and in ordinary church debates on several levels. Hence, what we have here is a notion of Christianity constructed against the background of its supposed national, ideological or political *uniqueness*. It works as a catalyst for the national as well as the intellectual, moral, and political identity of a people, and since Christianity refers to a *particular* church in time and space, it becomes very effective in discerning and denigrating the religious other who has no organic ties to this particular church or tradition.

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13 Sverigedemokraterna, "Trygghet och tradition."

14 Sverigedemokraterna, "Trygghet och tradition."

15 Sverigedemokraterna, "Partiprogram," http://partiprogram.se/sverigedemokraterna#-islam-och-i-synnerhet-dess-starka-politiska (accessed December 3, 2019).

16 Sverigedemokraterna, "Partiprogram."

3 Christian Populism in Hungary

Before I discuss what all of this might mean for Christian theology today, I will present examples of populism from another European context, namely Hungary, where Prime Minister Victor Orbán explicitly promotes what he calls "Christian democracy."[17] Orbán puts Christian democracy in contrast to liberal democracy, which he equates with mass migration, international capitalism, and cultural decay. I concentrate on a few concrete examples in order to get a closer look at the problems at hand.

In May 2019, in an interview regarding the election of the new president of the European Commission, Orbán made the following statement:

> I know what is in Hungary's interest. I'm enough of an old fox in the Brussels jungle—or in the Brussels forest—to know what kind of President of the Commission would serve Hungary's interests. What's more, I have a very clear mandate from the people: I must support a candidate who is opposed to immigration, who has national feelings, and who therefore respects European nations. And I must support a person who personally sees the importance of Christian culture, and who is prepared to protect it. This mandate comes with fixed conditions: I believe that the people have said that I must stand by only such a candidate.[18]

Here it becomes very clear what people-centrism is about. The political leader acts in the name of the people in order to secure the supposed pillars that keep the people together in a national community. In this case, like in the case of the Sweden Democrats, the Christian culture is strongly emphasized, but now more in the framework of a supposed common *European* identity, pitted against the outsiders, the immigrants. Accordingly, the new president of the Commission must have "national feelings," which in Orbán's view, means being in favor of nations that act according to their own national or nationalist traditions. Instead of a stronger European Union, Christianity is now marshalled as an alternative common cultural denominator between nations.

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17 Victor Orbán in "Interview with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on the Kossuth Radio programme 'Good morning, Hungary'," February 22, 2019, http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/interview-with-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-the-kossuth-radio-programme-good-morning-hungary-7/ (accessed June 29, 2020).

18 Victor Orbán in "Interview with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on the Kossuth Radio programme 'Good Morning Hungary'," May 31, 2019, https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/interview-with-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-the-kossuth-radio-programme-good-morning-hungary20190602 (accessed June 29, 2020).

It is interesting to note the circularity here. Orbán acts as the voice of the people by prescribing what is in Hungary's and the Hungarian people's interest, but at the same time he is eager to inform the people about what they should think. A few months earlier, in another interview, Orbán commented on a newly launched information campaign about immigration and its risks: "No one disputes that at the heart of the elections is the issue of immigration. People know less, however, about the detailed questions that together form the problem of immigration—or, as our information campaign says, what Brussels is planning."[19] "This information campaign is about their instruments and methods. Whoever wants to know about this and is interested can now access this information and read it. Indeed they can receive further information from us."[20]

Combined with the former quotation, this becomes an almost perfect example of populism, given my working definition. The people-centrism is here combined with a glaring anti-elitism, according to which the so-called EU-bureaucrats in Brussels are driving Europe to the brink of disaster. Furthermore, in this quotation, the people have to be made aware of their own interest, through a strategic information campaign, while in the former quotation, Orbán said he did everything on the supposed *mandate* of the people. This is the logic of populism. It is a way of keeping up people-centrism through an 'elitist anti-elitism' by any means available.

The picture of Orbán's populism can be complemented with an example in which Christianity is exploited in order to emphasize that there is a new world-order at hand and that Orbán's Christian Hungary is at the front of this development:

> The age of liberal democracy is at an end. Liberal democracy is no longer able to protect people's dignity, provide freedom, guarantee physical security or maintain Christian culture. Some in Europe are still tinkering with it, because they believe that they can repair it, but they fail to understand that it is not the structure that is defective: the world has changed. Our response to this changed world, the Hungarian people's response, has been to replace the shipwreck of liberal democracy by building 21st-century Christian democracy. This guarantees human dignity, freedom and security, protects equality between men and women and the traditional family model, suppresses anti-Semitism, defends our Christian culture

19 Orbán, "Interview," February 22, 2019.
20 Orbán, "Interview," February 22, 2019.

> and offers our nation the chance of survival and growth. We are Christian democrats, and we want Christian democracy.[21]

In view of the examples I have given so far, it is obvious that the problem with the combination of people-centrism and anti-elitism is, as Tommy Lynch shows in this volume, that one needs to simplify everything by narrating some kind of grand *conspiracy theory* which then is brought back *artificially* to represent the peoples experience.[22]

This problem in Orbán's populism is obvious. His grand narrative about Christianity in Eastern European countries as a vital democratic force of the people, replacing liberal democracy, does not match any statistics, neither of his own country, nor of the other countries that he so often mentions as an alternative to the western sphere of the EU. On the contrary, the public interest in Christianity in countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Croatia is steadily declining. One commentator, Will Collins, reports: "Data on church attendance confirm this picture of a rapidly secularizing society. Although a majority of Hungarians identify as Catholic, only 12 percent regularly attend church. Less than 15 percent of Hungarians say religion is 'very important' in their lives. Christmas markets, generous public subsidies to religious schools, and beautifully preserved churches have done little to arrest this steady decline."[23]

The problem is of course that the fictional *post-Christian* narrative about a strong and profound Christian identity among the people of Hungary and elsewhere is very difficult to counter, since very few really care about Christianity as such. Collins once more: "Shorn of its theological commitments, Christianity in Eastern Europe is in danger of being coopted by a particularly narrow and meanspirited brand of nationalism. Orbán, perhaps the most visible spokesman for Eastern Europe's nationalist revival, is … leading the way. His government recently banned the homeless from sleeping in public spaces,

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21 Victor Orbán, "Inaugural Speech, 2018," *Visegrád Post*, May 12, 2018, https://visegradpost.com/en/2018/05/12/viktor-orbans-full-speech-for-the-beginning-of-his-fourth-mandate/ (accessed June 29, 2020).

22 See Eirikur Bergmann, *Conspiracy and Populism: The Politics of Misinformation* (New York: PalgraveMacmillan: 2018). See also Thomas Lynch, "'Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you': Populism, Political Theology, and the Culturally Repugnant Other," in this volume.

23 Will Collins, "The Myth of a Christian Revival in Eastern Europe," *The American Conservative* (2019), https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-myth-of-a-christian-revival-in-eastern-europe/ (accessed June 29, 2020).

a move that has more to do with making Budapest palatable to foreign tourists than building a genuinely Christian society."[24]

4 Populism and the Role of the Theologian

This takes us over to the final part of this chapter, where I will focus on the challenges that the populists' Christianity poses to someone who wants to take seriously the Christian heritage and its contemporary meaning, but also values an open and generous public discourse on theology and religion in its actual plurality. The most important and most difficult challenge for European academic theology in view of the contemporary post-Christian situation is, I argue, to transform *itself* into a post-Christian enterprise, seeking a role and a position where it can confront public xenophobia more profoundly by means of its particular competence, which is tied to Christianity.

Most remaining faculties and departments of theology in Europe have become more or less secular insofar as that they do not any longer have any immediate or constitutive ties to church authorities. Although still often in dialogue with churches and their need for educated personnel, both education and research are based on secular premises. Note that I referred to theological institutions that are not dependent upon religious authorities '*any longer*'—for, indeed, they used to be. These institutions were of course founded in order to educate ministers of the national or regional churches, and this happened in a situation where society could be defined as Christian. Our scholarly traditions of theology have their roots in this ecclesial practice. This means that when we talk about a *secular* institutional framework for contemporary theology, we still have to take seriously its old Christian imprint. This makes academic theology ambiguous as a public intellectual institution and enterprise.

Against the backdrop of such an ambiguous picture of theology in secular society, Tracy's famous understanding of the public role of theology becomes understandable.[25] As I mentioned in the beginning, Tracy claims that theology speaks to the church, but it also has the duty to speak to the academy in general and to society at large. According to Tracy, there are different things

24 Collins, "The Myth of a Christian Revival in Eastern Europe."

25 I limit myself to Tracy here because of his great impact, although the debate on public theology has developed since he launched his tripartite structure. The point here is just to get hold of the contrast between a Christian and a post-Christian stance. See Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 69–105.

to do and say in relation to these three publics. But he seems to presuppose a common ground for the three spheres by claiming that theological discourse, in *all* its modes, is about the meaning of existence. Theology offers a "public response bearing meaning and truth on the most serious and difficult questions, both personal and communal, that any human being or society must face: Has existence ultimate meaning?"[26] I take this to be emblematic for an open-ended *Christian* theological logic, which can be defended as meaningful public discourse in a secular society. It presupposes a pre-established relationship between church, academy, and secular society insofar as it builds on an understanding of secularization from Christianity to a non-religious or a-religious state. Tracy operates with the presupposition that theology is driven out from the church because most people do not go to church any longer. Christian theology can now meet the needs of society by bringing the predicament of secular society into its own theoretical framework. The theologian has to transform her or his theological insights and adapt them to other publics than the church. Theology is providing society with the same content as it has always been providing the church, but now in another form that may attract new audiences.

Is this version of modern theological existence really possible to adapt to the new situation we have faced over the last two or three decades? At least one thing in Tracy's understanding of theology's public role still holds: The theologian constantly has to handle the question of his or her own role and place in society and make her- or himself available to a broader discourse on contemporary life. "For the very complexity of the contemporary theologian's social reality can also occasion serious and rigorous reflection relevant to the social role of all intellectuals."[27] However, in our time, where European Christianity has become a weapon in a fierce post-Christian struggle against Islam, it is vital that the discussion about these roles is taken to a new level. What does it mean to speak about the meaning of existence from a Christian point of view in a situation where the public significance of Christianity has, at least partly, been transformed into a shield against the other?

Instead of thinking so much about the specific audiences of theology, or what to say about this or that Christian theological problem, I believe the whole practice of theology needs to be renegotiated in view of this post-Christian challenge, both on the level of content and on the level of institutional profile. There just is no progressive movement from Christian society to secular society, where theology can play a new role by secretly secularizing itself

26 Tracy, *The Analogical imagination*, 4.
27 Tracy, *The Analogical imagination*, 28.

and answer to 'similar' needs as before. There is a movement, though, from a Christian to a multifaceted, plural, and complicated society in which today's representatives of Christian theology must be capable of producing a new kind of knowledge that can be useful in the struggle for a democratic and humane society. This new form of theology will not just come from nowhere, it must emerge from within our present theological departments and faculties. In this sense, it is precisely a post-Christian theology, since it will operate on the basis of the old Christian heritage, moving onwards to new encounters that will change it from within.

Pointing to my own special field of theology, systematic theology, I believe the most urgent task today is to work with the organization and coordination of competences, especially to integrate Islamic theology into the very core of our discipline. If Christian academic theology is to thrive in the future, it will have to do so in an academic setting where it is in constant and intimate interaction with Islamic theology, but also with other religious outlooks. This does not only mean that we guarantee a minority of people who are experts in Islamic theology a place among a majority of Christian theologians. It means that Christian theologians work together with Islamic theologians on a daily basis in order to diminish the differences by creating a *new type of post-Christian systematic competence*. It already happens in many different academic theological settings, such as Uppsala, Paderborn, Edinburgh, and Georgetown.

The same goes for biblical studies. Instead of preserving traditional Hebrew Bible and New Testament studies by delving into all kinds of narrow issues, as the trend has become in biblical scholarship, I believe it would be much more rewarding to use our energy to develop a joint discipline where Qur'anic studies could be an equal and integrated part, moving the discussion about religious texts in a direction that becomes socially and culturally relevant. The prospect presented in Hannah Strømmen's chapter in this volume is very promising in combination with Qur'anic studies: "political scripture research."[28]

To restructure and even reinvent traditional theological fields or disciplines in this way will indeed take some time and become conflictual, but we need pioneers on different levels that have the will and authority to establish research seminars and project groups that really are prepared to develop the theological field as a whole, and move the disciplines in a direction where we can find adequate responses to the present political challenges in which we find ourselves—to put it paradoxically—faced with populist approaches to our fields of expertise that no longer resonate with our expertise. Or more

28 Hannah Strømmen, "Sacred Scripts of Populism: Scripture-Practices in the European Far Right," in this volume.

technically: We need to be able to handle a new form of poisonous political discourse pertaining to our field of expertise without becoming entrapped by this very discourse.

Theologians of this post-Christian kind must be prepared to delve into questions about the intellectual, moral, cultural, and social differences that exist between Christian, Islamic, Jewish, secular traditions, practices, and concepts, trying to establish a new common ground for constructive discussions of this reality against the background of the secularized European Christian cultural heritage. This does not mean that old forms of theological scholarship have to be excluded, but theologians must invent new categories suitable for discussing theological aspects of the present condition and old forms of scholarship have to adapt to this new frame.

For this to become a reality, theologians will have to become much more respectful of the profound *secular* status of their academic institutions and willing to defend it both against populist forms of secularism and against anti-liberal approaches to Christianity—two opposing forces that each in their own way would like to close down all forms of open reflection. Many theologians are still by default defining themselves in relation to Christianity and the church, as if there is an unproblematic relationship between the ecclesial and the academic publics. The church is of course part of our society, and Christianity is highly important—to repeat, theology has of course an obligation to develop competence in these fields also in the future—but in a new social and cultural situation the theologian must also become much more autonomous and pluralistic than before in his or her relationship to practical religious life.

I call this 'post-Christian theology,' not because it is in any sense anti-Christian. It is 'post-*Christian*' because it comes from within a *Christian* society and it is '*post*-Christian' because it develops further in awareness of this, but without clinging to this identity. Post-Christian theology of this dialectical kind moves into the future with the mark of its particular heritage, but without all exclusivist claims, towards a hybrid identity.

Post-Christian theology stands in the sharpest possible contrast to the Christian populism I have discussed here. It is its reflective antidote. The populist presents cultural Christianity as something that is necessary for every true European, believer or not, since it may be used to establish an effective exclusion of the other. The focus is on identity, which is attractive and violent. For a post-Christian theologian, however, Christianity of this kind is theologically empty. Theological reflection must therefore bestow society with a public knowledge through which this emptiness can be exposed.

I started by claiming that we see today a devastating spiritual climate change in Europe and elsewhere. This might soon lead to a situation where extreme

right-wing parties and politicians take over our faculties and departments. We have seen it before in Europe. We can only hope that it will not happen tomorrow, because before it happens we will have to change our own mindset and renew our democratic sensibilities in order to help a new generation of theological intellectuals, our students, by giving them tools to develop a new solid competence for the future. When they are finally driven out from the faculties and departments by the fascists, they need to be equipped with relevant theological competences, they need to have and intellectual spirit of activism that can be useful for the good of all, even if they will have no safe resources to rely on.

PART 3

Reflections

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CHAPTER 10

From Incarnation to Identity: The Theological Background of National-Populist Politics in the Western Balkans

Zoran Grozdanov

"The fight to defend 'cultural uniqueness' may find sustenance in the fertile soil of the religious worlds that exist side-by-side in Europe, but these very different religious worlds may make something quite different of that struggle."[1] This thesis by Danièle Hervieu-Léger refers to the various embodiments of the "religious worlds" in specific cultures pertaining to different parts of the European continent. Cultural uniqueness, she claims, is connected to religious values, but the question to what extent religious values influence particular cultures is left open. Where do we stand with regard to the role that religion has in constructing a particular nation's cultural uniqueness and is there any theology in it? Or is it simply the case that cultural uniqueness wants to persevere through appeals to religion as one of the factors that determine the character of a particular nation's identity and culture?

The goal of this chapter is to investigate the role of religion in sustaining and supporting the values of nationalist and populist identity formations in the Western Balkans.[2] In many publications on the role of religion in the development of nationalism and populism one can find almost unanimous accord in the claim that religion has been hijacked by the leaders and movements that position 'people' against the 'other' or the 'elite.' But, is the relationship between religion and exclusionary movements so simple?[3] Defining the role of religion in the construction of people's identity which is formed by a specific culture is not a task of simply translating the interpretations and concepts from one context to the other. In her influential book *Imagining the Balkans*, Maria Todorova

1 Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "The Role of Religion in Establishing Social Cohesion," in *Religion in the New Europe*, ed. Krzysztof Michalski (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 45–63, at 53.

2 Of course, the situation in the Western Balkans is not unique when it comes to theological constructions of populism. For religious relics in the Brexit debate, see Lukas David Meyer, "The God of the Brexiteers," in this volume.

3 For a discussion of the trope of hijacking, see Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

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coined the term "Balkanism" to refer to different forms of cultural and political approaches to the geographical area of the Balkans taken by Western experts of all sorts. She described "Balkanism" as "one of the most persistent prescriptions, forms, schemas or 'mental patterns' through which the information on the Balkans are produced."[4] One of the reasons for her image of the Balkans—as a "process of… a creation of weak, small, economically backward and not independent states that need to be modernized"[5]—depends on the way the Balkan discourse was formed throughout the centuries. However, Todorova's "Balkanism," has a reversible course too—it refers to the implementation of the Western interpretations of various concepts, such as the role of the culture and the concept of a nation, by the Balkan experts that are not in concord with its historical, political, and religious context and processes.

Nowadays, very similar patterns can be identified in populism. Many theories of populism simply take that concept and transfer it to Balkan post-Communist societies and political communities, assuming that Balkan populisms can be explained with theories that disregard the specific characteristics of their political and historical processes. For instance, the thesis that "liberalization, individualization, and secularization as sociological phenomena, and the rise of secularism as a political doctrine had an impact at the political level,"[6] which led to populisms, simply cannot be applied to the Western Balkans since they did not experience secularization, liberalization, and individualization as processes that lasted for decades and are now under threat. Instead, these processes never really took place in these countries since one collective identity (the Communist one) was replaced with another one (the nationalist one). Notwithstanding the differences between Eastern and Western Europe, where the former is defined as 'Christian,' and the latter as 'secular,' the thesis that "populists from self-perceived secular and self-perceived religious countries employ the same kind of rhetoric," becomes questionable.[7]

The rhetoric of the latter is, as we will try to show, largely and implicitly supported by theological arguments that gave foundation to the 'Christian identity' of nations based on shared ethnic and cultural heritage and origins.

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4 Maria Todorova, "Predgovor drugom izdanju na srpskom jeziku", in: *Imaginarni Balkan* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2006), 5–36, at 7–8. The original volume appeared as *Imagining Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Throughout this chapter, all translations from Serbian and Croatian into English are my own, unless stated otherwise.

5 Todorova, *Imaginarni Balkan*, 11.

6 Renée Wagenvoorde, "The Religious Dimensions of Contemporary European Populism," in *Religion and European Society: A Primer*, ed. Benjamin Schewel and Erin K. Wilson (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 111–123, at 111.

7 Wagenvoorde, "The Religious Dimensions," 116.

1 Atemporality and the Rise of Populism

In this chapter we look into right-wing, ethno-national populism, the one that derives its definition of people from right-wing narratives, primarily defined by ethnic, national, cultural, and religious values. One of the main problems is that all the concepts of national-populism begin with the premise that the rising nationalism is a kind of 'new nationalism' in Europe, where the 'old one' has presumably been dead for decades. On the contrary, nationalism in the Balkan area is a permanent ideology in which populism just 'changed tune' and became an extension of the prevalent ethno-nationalism.[8]

The simple transference of interpretations when defining Balkan populisms is also a hard task due to a kind of 'atemporality' of the Balkan societies in which the processes of modernization, formation of nation states, acceptance (or rejection) of liberal democracies, and secularization appeared much later than in Western European counterparts.[9] One of the outcomes of this atemporality is the heightened role religion had in the formation of national identities and nationalisms which simply switched to populist agendas in the past decade. Here, the substantial difference between nationalism and populism is often unclear. The statement by the leader of the Polish National Democracy Movement, Roman Dmowski, that "[t]he Polish state is a Catholic state… because our state is a nation state, and the nation is a Catholic nation" may seem clearly populist,[10] but it springs from nationalist discourse that has a strong religious flavor. On top of that, in the Balkan area, the thesis of Pierre-André Taguieff that "we have to admit that we didn't see the forest for the trees: 'populism' as a rhetoric and a political style forbade us to see nationalism, which we believed is dead or dying," can be largely applied,[11] bearing in mind the following: the Balkan area does not see nationalism as dying, let alone dead. This we find to be a crucial feature in describing South Eastern populisms with all of the consequences for defining 'the elite vs. the people.'

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8 I refer to ethno-nationalism in the way Anthony Smith writes about it in his *Ethnic Origin of Nations* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 222–223.

9 On such atemporality and the relationship between processes in Western Europe and the Balkans, see Maria Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism," *Slavic Review* 1, no. 64 (2005): 140–164.

10 Roman Dmowski, quoted in Ben Stanley, "Defenders of the cross: populist politics and religion in post-communist Poland," in *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. Nadia Marzouki, Daniel McDonnell, and Olivier Roy (London: Hurst, 2016), 109–128, at 112.

11 Pierre-Andre Taguieff, *Osveta nacionalizma: Neopopulisti i ksenofobi u napadu na Europu* (Zagreb: Tim Press, 2017). The first edition appeared as *La revanche du nationalisme: Néo-populistes et xénophobes è l'assault de l'Europe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2015).

For the aforementioned reasons, this chapter will use a very minimalistic concept of populism which claims that "the political establishment is the externality against which populism's 'people' positions itself and without which populism cannot exist."[12] The question of the people is an area of huge contest and can only be defined according to particular contexts. We will argue that in the Western Balkan area, when the political establishment is opposed by the movements that put 'the people' in the center of political decision making, the establishment advocates a promotion of values which are not based on the cultural and religious values of a certain nation. However, 'the people' that positions itself against that establishment advocates values that are strongly influenced by religious concepts and which at their very core emphasize ethno-nationalist identity and cultural values, hostile to liberal-democratic and secular values.

With this we are proposing a thesis that may sound very general, and whenever there are general concepts at play, more often than not, they are incorrect. Still, the following questions arise: how can the term 'people' be described as founded in religious concepts and how and why do religious concepts necessarily lead to the opposition to the values informed by secularization and equality of all inhabitants within one political space, regardless of their ethnic, religious or cultural background? The opposition of religious values to the liberal-democratic ones is not self-evident. Nevertheless, within the Balkan context this opposition took the form of various interplays between cultural and ethno-national identities heavily shaped by core theological values which prevent the formation of secular and liberal-democratic societies thus becoming the target of populist movements.

2 Hijacked Religion?

Many monographs have been written on the relationship between the formation of nation states, ethnic affiliation, and religion in the Balkans in the past three decades.[13] Many of them were written in the midst or just after the wars in the 1990s, in which religion, according to many researchers, played a more or less divisive and exclusionary role. According to the majority of

12 Nadia Urbinati, "Political Theory of Populism," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 111–127, at 112.

13 See for instance Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); *Religion Quest and National Identity in the Balkans*, ed. Celia Hawkesworth, Muriel Heppell, and Harry Norris (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); and, most recently, Stipe Odak, *Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding: The Role of Religious Leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Berlin: Springer, 2020).

authors, the role of religion in the conflicts was defined either by its support for the ethno-nationalism that spread through the region after the collapse of the Communist regime or by the misuse of religion by the political actors or regimes that wanted to legitimize their role in the formation of nation states through strong adherence to religious values.[14] These values, as the story goes, played an important role in the century long survival of the ethnic communities that served as the basis for the formation of nation states. However, these roles were primarily investigated through a historical, ethnographic or sociological lens. It was argued that religion had played a huge role in preservation of ethnic affiliation and identity during the Ottoman, Habsburg, or Yugoslav regimes which did not allow the formation of nation states and which suppressed national identities. Of special importance were the concepts used by Western authors who claimed that what we had seen in the Balkans were the "Balkan Ghosts,"[15] mythologizing the causes of the conflict and putting them into the sphere of unknowable and analytically ungraspable. Placing the Balkan conflict within the territory of 'ghosts' implies that Balkan territory as such was governed by wild and indiscernible forces which, to the modern Western rational and secular mind, may seem completely incomprehensible. One of the reasons for this kind of mythologization is certainly the fact that the Balkan conflicts took place around the issues of ethnic identities which, it was assumed, had long been overcome in Western discourse. Moreover, these conflicts included religious affiliations which resurfaced after the Communist regime and largely presented not only forms of belief but also identity markers. This chapter does not deal with the nature of that conflict, but with the causes and results of determining the ethnic affiliation during those conflicts which certainly played an important role in what we today see as populist, or national-populist, speech.[16] Those conflicts in the Western Balkans political and cultural arena, as we will attempt to show, were upheld for the same reason the matters of national and ethnic identity today occupy the key position when the people confront the elite. These elites, too, are difficult to determine since the political elites on the territory of the Western Balkans also advocate national politics.[17]

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14 See Slavica Jakelić, *Collectivistic Religions: Religion, Choice, and Identity in Late Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2010), esp. 79–139; Perica, *Balkan Idols*, esp. 3–16.

15 As in the title of the influential book by Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

16 Here we are using and relying on Taguieff's term "national-populist." He first used it in his article "La rhétorique du national-populisme: Les règles élémentaires de la propagande xeno- phobe," in *Mots: Les langages du politique* 9 (1984): 113–139.

17 Nenad Miščević. "Populism and Nationalism," in *New Politics of Decisionism*, ed. Violeta Beširević (The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, 2019), 61–90, at 62, stresses

The current surge of populism in the Western Balkans is, to quote philosopher Nenad Miščević, a "riddle."[18] The development of nationalisms in the 1980s and the 1990s did not cause any "strong national populism in the highest ranks of the establishment."[19] However, populist movements are a part of civil society organizations whose arguments are amply supported by religious leaders who base their line of thought on religious 'imagery'—which serves as theological foundation for concepts such as people, nation, patriotism, and culture. This is a consequence, again according to Miščević, of the fact that the mainstream of the elites' political activity is strongly nationalist, which narrows the maneuver area of those national-populist movements in the political arena who accuse the elites of betraying the 'will of people.' On the social plane the situation is significantly different—it is where the right-wing populism is united with religious identities thus forming a conglomerate which clearly defines the elites. These elites do not promote politics which are in accordance with the religious values comprising the 'will of the people.' This will was defined decades ago through culture and the vision of nation based on theologies which advocated the unity of national and religious values in the formation of nation states.

3 Western-Balkan Religions of Nation

The story behind the interconnectedness of religion, nation, and culture is very complex, but for the purposes of our argumentation we will use two examples—a Serbian and a Croatian one. In his account of how the monastery Hilandar on the Holy Mountain in Greece is seen as not only the source of Serbian spirituality but also the foundation of Serbian state, Ivan Čolović, a Serbian cultural theorist and ethnologist, addresses something he calls "religion of nation"—a term which played an important role in the formation of the identity of nations after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Čolović does not define the religion of nation as the "national religion," the religion which the majority of the population of a certain country affiliates with, but rather as "a process in which sanctities of a traditional religion are secularized, in such a way that their sacredness is transferred, it is converted into the sacredness of secular

another very similar point: "In the Croatian situation, the two do not go well together, since the ruling party has proved its patriotic attitude and is not open to anti-elitist attacks from this side."

18 Miščević, "Populism and Nationalism," 62.

19 Miščević, "Populism and Nationalism," 62.

religion which celebrates the deified nation."[20] The conversion of the sanctity of traditional religion into the sanctity of secular religion is not a unilateral process—it is not only that nationalist politics tries to establish its rule by using the sanctities of its (in Serbia mainly Orthodox) people, but also that the religious leaders approach the symbiosis of the religious and the national with the aim to provide the nation state with the unity crucial for the formation of the spiritual values of a national state. "It is interesting," Čolović goes on to explain, "that priests and the dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church not only approve of this transfer of sacredness from the Orthodox religion to the religion of nation, but also take part in it."[21] Their participation in the secular religion of nationalism confirms that the cult of the Serbian nation is "an ally and they are ready to put their arsenal of relics at its disposal."[22]

The unity of religious cult, religious sanctities, and the establishment of the nation state is visible not only in the case of Hilandar, but is pertinent to yet another nation from the area of former Yugoslavia—the Roman Catholic Croatia. During the Communist regime, in the 1970s and 1980s, when religious identities were politically and socially marginalized, be it for the sake of the Communist ideology or for the sake of avoiding new conflicts in which religion represented one of the bearers of ethnic identities, the Catholic Church in Croatia organized a celebration to commemorate the historical arrival of Christianity to Croatia.[23] In major public manifestations the same "transfer of sacredness" that Čolović applies to the Serbian context took place in Croatia. This religious manifestation is described in the following way: "With this project the Church among Croats quite covertly attempted to point to the problems and difficulties Croatian people with their Church were facing in the Yugoslav regime. The aim of the project was to strengthen maximally the national identity, dive into the final solution of the Croatian national issue, and in some favorable turn of events, also prepare the grounds for Croatia's exit from Yugoslavia."[24] The chief editor of *Glas Koncila* (*The Voice of the Council*),

20 Ivan Čolović, "U Hilandaru: Nacionalizam kao religija," in Ivan Čolović, *Balkan: Teror kulture* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2008), 183–199, at 193.

21 Ivan Čolović, "U Hilandaru", 193.

22 Ivan Čolović, "U Hilandaru", 193.

23 One of the consequences of this manifestation is the coining of the term "Catholic Church among Croats," which remains in use until today, pointing to the ethnicization of the role of the Church. On that process, see Branko Sekulić, "The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligiosity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia," PhD diss., Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 2019, 103–104.

24 Darko Hudelist, *Rim, a ne Beograd: promjena doba i mirna ofenziva Katoličke crkve u Hrvatskoj u Titovoj SFR Jugoslaviji* (*1975–1984*) (Zagreb: Alfa, 2017), 57.

the most influential Catholic magazine in Yugoslavia, writes the following: "In the seventies and the eighties when the Church performed the grand celebration of the thirteen centuries of Christianity in Croatia, the Church did it on purpose, certain that serving the national identity cannot be separated from its mission of serving human dignity."[25] In order to justify the connection between national identity and the affiliation with Christianity, he continues: "We spoke about the inculturation or incarnation of Christianity into the Croatian national being... With God's Incarnation into concrete human nature, the Church too, as the body of Christ in each people that received Christianity, appears as the new, communal Incarnation of Christ. This is why we claimed that with the Church in Croatia, Christ spoke Croatian."[26]

Both cases arise from different cultural and religious contexts—the first one from the Orthodox, and the latter from the Roman Catholic religious and cultural background. Still, one may ask: why did this natural bond between religious and national affiliation come about as though one presupposes the other and both are mutually supportive?

In an attempt to answer this question, we will focus on the "Western" twin of the two cases, the Roman Catholic one, as it seems important in explaining the role of religious identities in national-populist movements in the Western Balkans bounded by Catholicism. It will also help to explain why religious populism and nationalism are used as arguments against the principles which place not *ethnos*, but *demos* at the core of their political activity. When Croatian theologian Živko Kustić speaks about the role of Christianity in the formation of the nation, he clearly states that when there is a "symbiosis of Christianity with the unique expressions of the people's soul..., it must be emphasized that here the people do not refer to the community of citizens, but to the community of a shared cultural heritage. It is ethnos, and not demos we are talking about."[27] According to Kustić, the binding of the religious to the ethnic in a particular people takes place along the lines of understanding the role of inculturation, also emphasized by the Second Vatican Council. In this way, the theological doctrine of the Incarnation is put into direct relationship with the role Christianity has in defining culture and a people's values on the basis of ethnic belonging. This is the theological and, as time would tell, political program which dominated the territory of Eastern European countries under the Communist regime since the 1970s and which started contemplating the role Christianity had in the formation of national identity through very

25 Živko Kustić, *Hrvatska: mit ili misterij* (Zagreb: Minerva, 1995), 234.
26 Živko Kustić, *Hrvatska*, 234–235.
27 Kustić, *Hrvatska*, 234.

strong demands for the establishments of nation states. These demands did not attempt to transform the Communist regime, "humanize" or "democratize" it.[28] They aimed at strengthening the roles of national communities within the regime which saw the ethnic and national differences as inferior in relation to citizenship. Revoking ethnicity, the approach which is "emphasizing the importance of 'primordial' ties based on kinship, race, territory, language and religion," as Todorova points out, "views ethnic communities and nations as essential and natural elements of the historical experience of mankind,"[29] as opposed to the matters of class or political communities not based on ethnicity, as was the case with Yugoslavia. Kustić confirms Todorova's statement when he says that "a Christian cannot be a cosmopolitan because Christianity is in its definition incarnational, whereas being a cosmopolitan is not more than an idea." [30]

The final two decades of the Communist regime were marked by political dissidents' and religious elites' attempts to find reasons for the separation of national communities from a multinational state. One of the main distinctive characteristics of a particular national community was precisely its affiliation with religious identities which, in the case of traditionally Catholic national communities, gained importance precisely through closely tying religion to ethno-national and cultural identity. These close ties were the foundation on which national states were built in the 1990s.

4 Incarnation and Identity

Along with the historical reasons elaborated here, which have to do with the desire for national liberation—or in the words of Croatian sociologist of religion Željko Mardešić, on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia "there was a theology of (national) liberation"[31]—we will also focus on the theological roots of defining a nation by means of Christian doctrines, or more specifically, the

28 On the missed opportunities of Yugoslavian theologians to build a political theology before the rise of ethno-theologies, in a dialogue with the then prevalent theologies of Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, via Marxist thinkers, see Darko Đogo, "Politikantska ili politička teologija 1945–2000 ili o (ne)mogućnosti jedne jugoslavenske političke teologije," in *Opasna sjećanja i pomirenje: kontekstualna razmišljanja o religiji u postkonfliktnom društvu*, ed. Srđan Sremac, Zoran Grozdanov, and Nikola Knežević (Rijeka: Ex libris, 2010), 93–127, at 114–115.

29 Maria Todorova, "Ethnicity, Nationalism and Communist heritage in Eastern Europe," *East European Politics & Societies* 7, no. 1 (1992): 135–154, at 136.

30 Hudelist, *Rim*, 233.

31 Željko Mardešić, *Rascjep u svetome* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2007), 758.

Incarnation. The introduction of the Incarnation in defining the unbreakable bond between Christianity, ethnos, people, and nation in ex-Yugoslavia underwent two parallel processes.

On the one hand, as early as in the 1970s the leading Croatian theologian Tomislav Janko Šagi Bunić elaborated on the incarnation of Christianity in the (ethnically defined) people: "Christianity is a gift from God, His word and salvation, and as such does not reject or ruin the religious forms a people has created, but accepts and purifies them, is incorporated in them"[32] and "Christianity, Church, cannot be some sort of abstraction, they have to be a concrete community, a living community of people which is why they have to exist with a people, in a people's community."[33] On the other hand, John Paul II, in his encyclical letter *Laborem exercens* in 1979, writes the following: "Man ties his deepest human identity to an affiliation with a people,"[34] a thesis he elaborates in his later encyclicals, as well as in his *Memory and Identity*.[35]

Croatian theologians and Pope John Paul II start form the same assumption—God was incarnated into a concrete, rather than an abstract, human being. Following this assumption, one's identity is substantially tied to the affiliation with a nation, or, as defined by John Paul II: "The fatherland and native land are, from the conceptual point of view, closely connected to giving birth, but the concept of nation also has a relationship, from the etymological point of view, with giving birth. The concept of 'nation' determines a community inhabiting a particular area and which is distinguished from other communities by its own culture," [36] where "the sacrament of Incarnation, as the foundation of Church, belongs to the theology of nation."[37] Theologians, including the former Pope, emphasize two important points here. Incarnation is incarnation into a concrete human being, and not into abstract human nature. From this, they conclude that there is a close connection between giving birth, understood in a biological sense, and the determination of a concrete human being as the one whose affiliation with people, nation, and culture is

32 Tomislav Janko Šagi Bunić, *Katolička crkva i hrvatski narod* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1983), 10.

33 Bunić, *Katolička crkva*, 14.

34 John Paul II, *Laborem exercens* (1979), http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html, §10 (accessed May 15, 2020).

35 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje i identitet: razgovori na prijelazu tisućljeća* (Split: Verbum, 2005), 72 (my translation). For an English translation, see John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005).

36 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 72.

37 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 74.

a primordial given. Thus, it is argued, the Incarnation itself is a basis for the culture of nation.

In his comprehensive work on the rise of the Catholic theology of nationality, Dorian Llywelyn states: "The strength of a theological discussion on nationality that takes the Incarnation as its starting point will depend on what values, realities, and experiences it is willing to include in Christ's humanity, and what relative importance they are given."[38] For John Paul II those values, which we inscribe into Christ's human nature, include a "particular ethno-cultural identity," because if "cultural belonging or social identity [are] a constitutive part of what it is to be human, then in the Incarnation that property may also be predicated of the Word… Socio-cultural identity thereby becomes not only a Christological but also a fully theological category."[39]

5 For Culture until Death!

Matters of culture and affiliation with a nation as full-blooded theological categories, as described by John Paul II, gained many different interpretations in the Eastern European context, mainly tied to political ideologies of countries shaped by religious identities. Nevertheless, it is important for our context to note that the matters of culture and identity became ideological means in creating nation states founded on values which comprise national identity. It is here that John Paul II provides guidelines for examining national identity as being organically connected to an individual and the culture he or she originates from.

Speaking about the concepts of native land and nation, Pope John Paul II emphasizes that "family, nation and native land are irreplaceable realities" where native land "includes values and spiritual substance which make up a culture of a particular nation."[40] He goes on to say that in the native land there is "a deep connection between spiritual and material aspects, culture and territory."[41] Culture, territory, and the spiritual dimension are the key concepts the Pope uses to describe the basic identity of an individual and a people, endowing them with a theological dimension. Apart from the Pope's primordial definition of human identity, due to which all the countries of Western Europe

38 Dorian Llywelyn, *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 200.

39 Llywelyn, *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality*, 200.

40 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 71.

41 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 65.

that are not based on an ethnic or cultural notion of nation, are "in the stage which could be called post-identity,"[42] it is important to look into the ways the concepts of culture, nation, and territory were interpreted in the Western Balkan context and why that interpretation is relevant for understanding the nationalism and populism largely based on the categories mentioned by the Pope.

Culture, nation, spiritual unity, and territory were the key categories the newly founded states used in their transfer from Communism to their attempts at forming liberal democracies. These categories were used to emphasize a particular nation's distinctiveness from 'the other'—their culture, territory, and national unity. We might say that this is a natural process of creating national states in the Balkans which have drawn from their past arguments of language and cultural heritage imbued with religion in order to express their distinctiveness and independence from those countries they for years cohabitated with in various political communities. Nevertheless, what provided these attempts with special vigor was the theological stronghold with which arguments for one's distinctiveness gained a religious dimension which was woven into the national struggle for independence itself. In other words, the theological foundation "of a particular ethno-cultural identity"[43] in the Eastern European context empowered those movements which sought to establish the nation by emphasizing ethno-cultural particularities, one of which, in traditionally Catholic cultures, was religion. It does not come as a surprise, then, that the Incarnation, having assumed the entire ethno-cultural identity of an individual and a people, also entailed a national-political program. Along these lines, Darko Hudelist claims that the analysis of national identity based on the Incarnation "may have been, and certainly was used by the Catholic Church in Croatia as the conceptual-theoretical justification not only for its pastoral, but also national-political activity among Croats."[44]

Culture, as a particular nation's mark of distinctiveness, as well as a value a nation is founded on, apart from ideological and institutional dimensions, gained a religious dimension very early on during the creation of nation states. Prominent Croatian priest and a theologian, Drago Šimundža, in a project sponsored by the Croatian Government, stresses the following: "Spiritual renewal, as a means of support of progress and national revival, is not a matter of a party or an ideology, but is in the function of education and culture."[45]

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42 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 88.

43 Llywelyn, *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality*, 200.

44 Hudelist, *Rim*, 236.

45 Drago Šimundža, "Osnovne odrednice duhovne obnove," in *Duhovna obnova Hrvatske*, ed. Anto Baković (Zagreb: Vlada Republike Hrvatske, 1992), 67–74, at 72.

The same author claims that Croatia's spiritual renewal is "a matter of all the authorities and religious communities." [46] Another prominent Croatian Christian intellectual, Radovan Grgec, says that "Croatia's spiritual renewal consists of solidarity towards ... the sufferers and warriors of wounded Croatia" and "this kind of solidarity is in accord with the plan of Croatia's overall unity and renewal, be it spiritual or material."[47]

What are the consequences of such a vision of culture espoused by theologians, Christian intellectuals, and national programs? Culture, as a means founding a nation state in war and post-war times, could be seen as a "garden," to use Zygmunt Bauman's metaphor.[48] In this garden only what was required for the formation of the nation's identity was to be nurtured, whereas all that was deemed undesirable was to be rooted out. Theologians greatly supported such visions by grounding national culture in the Incarnation to the extent that religion "became a privileged focal point of national spirit and a key feature of Croatia's identity ... it is what makes us what we are. In the spiritual, moral, cultural and national sense."[49] The close connection between culture and national identity resulted in a politics which took a culture and an identity cleansed of all traces of ethnic and religious 'otherness' as focal point of its programs and ideologies. As such, it became the foundation for the development of nationalist, and in the last decade, also populist politics which, at the mention of 'the people' point towards precisely these cultural values imbued with religious content.

Nevertheless, one must take a closer look at Wojtyla's and Bunić's perspective on nationalism and the role the nation plays in a particular political community. John Paul II condemns nationalisms time and again, stressing their "dramatic consequences" in the twentieth century when they "acknowledged and sought their own good, disregarding the rights of other nations."[50] A nation's role is to provide other nations with "the same rights they seek for their own native land,"[51] emphasizing patriotism as the right way with which these communities can claim the right for their homeland. While John Paul II holds national culture and national identity in high esteem, he nevertheless

46 Šimundža, "Osnovne odrednice," 73.

47 Radovan Grgec, "Duhovna obnova sa stanovišta kršćana," in *Duhovna obnova Hrvatske*, 39–40, at 39.

48 See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989), 92, 113–114. We can find very similar terminology in John Paul II, who defines culture as "farming" or as "land." Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 67

49 Drago Šimundža, *Crkva i demokracija* (Split: Crkva u svijetu, 1995), 292.

50 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 71.

51 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 71.

puts them into perspective by using eschatological categories for the sake of Christian universality: "In the New Testament, each nation has the right of citizenship," "and the history of all nations is welcomed into the history of salvation."[52] Here, the Pope is using the term patriotism and, along the lines of Pope Pius XI, "healthy nationalism," which Wojtyla and Croatian theologians saw as a means of preserving one's language, history, tradition, and territory and so they became a value worth dying for, as witnessed by "graves of soldiers who fought for Poland."[53]

6 Are We the People?

'We are the people,' was chanted across Eastern European countries just before the fall of the Berlin Wall and Communism. It was with this cry that the citizens of Communist countries demanded their rights for participation in political decision making. It was also a cry of solidarity with those on the other side of the ideological curtain. But soon, the 'We' in Eastern Europe started "relinquishing its autonomy to new (nationalist?) Führer who manipulated old memories and new insecurities."[54] The cry that started as a demand for political representation and solidarity almost simultaneously became the cry for the constitution of states based on ethnicity and a culture which, as Terry Eagleton puts it, did not become something "you put on the cassette player; it is what you kill for."[55] 'People,' defined by the heritage of cultural, religious, and ethnic values as its primary goal had, to use the image of the "garden" again, meant the uprooting of the ethnically, religiously, and culturally 'other.'

Although theologians and the Pope used the Incarnation as a doctrine that gave value to the concepts of ethnicity, culture, and nation, the question arises if the Incarnation ought to be a foundation for nationalist and populist agendas. Certainly not, but in the interplay between the Incarnation as a theological legitimization of invoking 'the people' and all the cultural characteristics that are clearly founded on ethnicity and religion, the Pope's strong speeches and texts against dividing people according to the lines of their particular identities, seem paradoxical and, within the context of the states founded on ethnic principles, very often futile. When we speak of the role of religion in

52 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 75.
53 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 70.
54 Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9.
55 Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 41.

populist movements, the popular phrase "believing or belonging" is put to test. In the Western Balkan context, believing really meant belonging and this was to a great extent the result of theologies such as Pope John Paul II's.

To conclude, on the one side, we have a strong primordial definition of national identities, joined with strong theological arguments and, on the other side, we have the invitation to cross the boundaries of those particular identities for the sake of "New Israel… that is represented with the mark of universality."[56] However, on the level of the implementation of the theologies of particular ethno-national identities, we have a theological legitimization of proclaiming as 'other' the communities and identities (ethnic minorities, members of the LGBT+ community, immigrants) which are all targets of populist movements in the Balkans. They do not participate in 'our' cultural and religious heritage since "we have to organically hold the Christian consciousness and its moral practice… we must return to our roots and sources since this consciousness is a spiritual and biological foundation of our national being and its future."[57]

56 Ivan Pavao II, *Sjećanje*, 75.
57 Šimundža, *Crkva*, 291.

CHAPTER 11

Querying Populism by Queering Chantal Mouffe: Understanding Hetero-Patriarchal Populism

Ludger Viefhues-Bailey

Why is the defense of Christian national identities and of allegedly traditional gender roles so important for populist movements supporting illiberal democracies? Referencing cases from the U.S. context, I will argue that contemporary populist movements in support of illiberal democracies reveal the following truth about democratic governance: since sovereignty is placed in 'the people,' any democracy needs to incite and discipline sexual passions. Conservative Christianities stand ready to serve and profit from this need for passionate politics. First, I will use Chantal Mouffe's distinction between the democratic and the liberal logics of democracies to argue that illiberal populists mobilize the former and do so, by definition, at the expense of the latter. Second, I will turn to Mouffe's concept of passionate politics. Here I will examine Trumpist rhetoric on immigration as a case study for the passionate politics required for the production of 'the people' as sovereign. Third, I will turn to White U.S. Evangelical theologies of marital sex to analyze the passion missing in Mouffe's analysis of the political: sex. In general, this analysis allows us to contextualize the recent emergence of illiberal populist Christianities. At a time when neoliberal globalization makes the replacement of labor less pressing for capital and when national sovereignty weakened, un-reproductive sexual passions could be folded into the maintenance of the state. Yet, even if employers and global capitalists do not require the reproduction of 'the people,' the democratic state needs it. Sexual passions are part of the political and Christian hetero-patriarchy stands ready to incite and domesticate them.

1 The Need for a Queer Intervention

To begin, let me quickly clarify some central concepts, like 'populism' or 'illiberal democracy.' The Political scientist Eszter Kováts, like others, is wary of term populism. If the term can apply to actors as different as Donald Trump and

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Bernie Sanders, the term seems to have lost analytic power.[1] She shares with Chantal Mouffe the suspicion that we are witnessing an "anti-populist hysteria" aimed at delegitimizing political movements that challenge the neoliberal consensus.[2]And yet, turning to Mouffe allows us to get a more precise handle on the phenomenon of populism: She points out that the current historical project of democracy as it arose in the North Atlantic cultural nexus exists as tension. This is the tension between a liberal logic of universal human rights and individual freedoms, on the one hand, and the democratic logic based on equality and popular sovereignty, on the other. The conflictual intertwining of both logics makes liberal democracy work: the liberal logic challenges the exclusionary tendencies inherent in the need to produce the sovereign people; the democratic logic assures that the rights and freedoms of citizens are the product of the sovereign will of the people.

In a Mouffian picture, the democratic logic of democracy is by definition illiberal because it is invested in the production of a particular people as sovereign. What goes wrong is not populism, but the lack of democratic logic in the pursuit of liberalism. The competing logics must be instantiated in institutions of governance and of political life. So, when the pressures of global capital or of supra-national political integration instantiate an order of rights and freedoms that is universal but not legitimized by the people concerned, the balance of the liberal and democratic logic of democracy is out of whack. We should therefore expect movements to emerge that marshal the, by definition illiberal, logic of democratic sovereignty.

Mouffe allows us to offer what I want to call a systemic demand-side explanation for the emergence of populist movements in support of the democratic logic of democracy. In an institutional environment characterized by supra-national political and global economic integration, policy decisions (including those purportedly in the service of universal human rights) lack democratic legitimacy. This institutional demand-side explanation can link with empirical comparative studies by political scientist Daphne Halikiopoulou and others that demonstrate that economic grievances per se are insufficient to account for the rise of illiberal populist movements. Instead, what predicts such movements are unmet economic demands together with a crisis of legitimacy of democratic institutions.[3]

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1 Ester Kováts, "Questioning Consensus: Right-Wing Populism, Anti-Populism, and the Threat of 'Gender Ideology,'" *Sociological Research Online* 23, no. 2 (2018): 528–538.

2 Chantal Mouffe, "The Populist Challenge," *Open Democracy*, December 5, 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/populist-challenge/ (accessed August 5, 2020).

3 Daphne Halikiopoulou and Sofia Vasilopoulou, "Breaching the Social Contract: Crises of Democratic Representation and Patterns of Extreme Right Party Support," *Government and Opposition* 53, no. 1 (2018): 26–50; Daphne Halikiopoulou and Tim Vlandas, "When economic

For this chapter, I want to focus on what Matthew Golder calls "exclusionary" populists: movements that seek to exclude certain groups from 'the people'.[4] In particular, I am concerned here with the marriage of Trumpism and Evangelical Christianity as an example of an exclusionary populist movement in support of the democratic logic of democracy.

Training this Mouffean lens onto exclusionary populism allows us to analyze it from the perspective of queer theory and political theology. The former de-naturalizes sexuality by inquiring into the types of sexualities that particular political constellations make possible; the latter (as I understand it) de-super-naturalizes theology by asking what visions of the divine and ourselves these constellations foreclose or make visible. Note however that this approach does not imply reductionism. Both sexuality and theology exceed their socio-political form. And yet this form makes them viable and plausible in our world. To address these perspectives from queer theory and political theology we need to account for the marked presence of hetero-patriarchal discourses in the populist movements in support of the democratic logic of democracy, a phenomenon that has been noted more often than it has been analyzed.[5] Thus, we need to ask why are concerns over gender, reproductive freedoms, and marriage rights at stake in these movements? And what

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and cultural interests align: the anti-immigration voter coalitions driving far right party success in Europe," *European Political Science Review*, 12, no. 4 (2020): 427–448.

4 Matthew Golder defines populism as a political ideology that (1) posits a conflict between the morally superior and homogeneous unified 'people' and the corrupted elites and outsiders; and (2) rejects the idea that the political process should be about negotiating conflicting interests of a plurality of stakeholders within the polity. Central for Golder, then, is the construction of 'the people,' as the main concern for populism. This construction can be inclusionary or exclusionary: inclusionary populism tries to extend material and political benefits to "historically disadvantaged and excluded groups. In contrast, exclusionary populism seeks to exclude certain groups from 'the people' and thus limit their access to these same benefits and rights." Matt Golder, "Far Right Parties in Europe," *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016): 477–497, at 479. In Golder's definition, populism in general and exclusionary populism in particular oppose liberal democracy, understood as a political system committed to checks and balances on the majority's ability to exert its will. Moreover, the idea that the people are homogeneous and that thus politics are not the legitimate space to bargain about conflicting interests, makes populism incompatible with pluralism.

5 To a degree I share the potential concern some readers could raise that the term 'hetero-patriarchal' glosses over the intersectional differences in the production and experience of sexuality. Persistently acknowledging the interlocking features of patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and empire, bell hooks, *Understanding Patriarchy*, (Louisville, KY: Louisville Anarchist Federation Federation, 2010), 1, writes: "Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence."

opportunity structure does the democratic logic of democracy offer for the production of particular Christian theologies?

For Kováts, who follows Mouffe, gender is only of instrumental importance. It marks a battle line between the global system of neoliberal economics and that of a universal human rights discourse.[6] Thus, according to her, the debates about issues of sexuality are not really about sexuality. In contrast, I want to offer a systemic demand side explanation of the emergence of populist movements in support of the democratic logic of democracy, one according to which contestations over sexuality are about sexuality, particular in the context of national reproduction.

2 Passionate Politics

Focusing on the problem of national reproduction allows us to see that the passionate politics on display in current populist movements are not a novelty.[7] Rather, they express a latent feature of Western secular democracies reflecting a systemic demand inherent in the Western ideal of popular sovereignty: This is the urgency of how to create what the sociologist John Lie calls "peoplehood," the deep sense of belonging to a nation or particular ethnic group commanding or allowing political attachment.[8] Democracies can only function as such if they produce their people.

Mouffe's reworking of Carl Schmitt gives an account of the production of peoplehood that lays bare the libidinal element in the political. For her, the people as a cohesive moral unity are produced by mobilizing the passions of antagonism. In Mouffe's reworking of Schmitt, antagonistic passions produce the friend/enemy distinction *ad extram* by establishing who 'we' are as a people in contrast to other people or to others who are not a people. The 'we' that any polity must produce as a moral center establishes itself in defiance of its other, the 'them.' And because this very center is ontologically empty, the process of antagonistic identity formation has to be iterative and is always incomplete. Hence, it makes sense that, as Golder observes, 'populism' focuses incessantly on the homogeneity and alleged unity of the people, a unity that is threatened

In this chapter, we will see how this system produces power through its intersection with whiteness and the structures of democratic governance.

6 Kováts, "Questioning Consensus."

7 Daphne Halikiopoulou, Steven E. Mock, and Sophia Vasilopoulou, "The Civic Zeitgeist: Nationalism and Liberal Values in the European Radical Right," *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (2013): 107–127.

8 John Lie, *Modern Peoplehood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

by the need to compromise and weigh conflicting interests. But this observation does not square well with another Mouffian claim. The political (at least *ad intram*) is marked by the negotiations of conflicts that allow compromise and that are not a matter of the (moral) death or life of the people.[9]

The question then follows of whether the logic of democracy in a democratic state can sustain the political, which is marked by the logic of non-moral conflict. The mobilization of antagonism *ad extram* poses a problem for democratic processes *ad intram*, where Mouffe decries the moralization of political issues that disallows political battles. Thus, the task of politics is to domesticate these antagonistic passions *ad extram* into the constrained struggle of political agonism among adversaries *ad intram*. This domestication requires that 'we' stop seeing 'them' as enemies, as moral evil to be eradicated. Instead the 'other' becomes an adversary, a partner in a political struggle. Still the goal is to vanquish the political opponent—but not by denying their existence.

3 Queering Mouffe's Passionate Politics

While Mouffe highlights the importance of antagonistic and adversarial passions, she does not consider another libidinal register in the service of (re) producing the people: sexual passions. This is surprising given the extensive literature on sexuality and the nation, ranging from Anne Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, or Pascal Blanchard's *Sexe, race et colonies*, to Nira Yuval-Davis's groundbreaking work, *Gender and Nation*.[10]

3.1 *Border-Ex* ad Extram

Following Cynthia Enloe, Yuval-Davis argues that in nationalist war rhetoric, men are supposed to fight for "womenandchildren" (sic!).[11] "Women" are not only like children (allegedly helpless and in need of male protection) but also women-and-children together represent the reproductive future of the

9 Alexandra Morrison, "Rescuing politics from liberalism: Butler and Mouffe on affectivity and the place of ethics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44, no. 5 (2018): 785–800; Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (New York: Verso, 2013).

10 Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); *Sexe, race et colonies*, ed. Pascal Blanchard (Paris: La Découverte, 2019); Nira Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation," in *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: the Politics of Transition*, ed. Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998), 21–31.

11 Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation," 25–27.

nation. Attacking another nation at its core will always imply attacking their reproductive future by attacking their women. Militarized rape then is the clearest form of wars between nations. By fusing the emotions men are supposed to associate with the nation (honor, collective power) with those associated with reproduction (eros), the border of the nation becomes violently eroticized.[12]

This is evident in the rhetorical productions of what the Americanist Samira Saramo calls "Trumpism," which she defines "as a social movement characterized by populism, strongman politics, and identitarianism."[13] This identitarianism produces a world where violent 'Mexican' rapists enter the nation unchecked and where the threat to the nation is encoded as (unlawful) penetration. The nation's borders, in contrast, appear as a passive and vulnerable space. A physical cordon preventing penetration is necessary.

According to Trumpism, the border is the place of an intensely moral and sexual contrast, a contrast that calls for a savior's decisive intervention. A refrain in Trump's 2017 acceptance speech was, 'I alone...': Trump alone can save the United States from the impending apocalypse. He described this threatening world of doom in clear ethnocentric and religious terms. Chinese, Mexicans, and Blacks threaten the forgotten Whites of 'America.' Terrorism and trade are the weapons of destruction that will wipe out 'America.' Unless we let Trump be in charge, so that he can do what he needs to do. The scholars of rhetoric Kathleen Jamieson and Doron Taussig point out that Trump's use of a rhetoric of intensification sharpens the boundaries between his own positive powers and his opponent's dangerous incompetence or malice.[14]

Jamieson and Taussig do not explore further the religious resonances of his Manichean rhetoric. Yet religion is very present in the world created by Trump's rhetoric. It is present in both form and content. Some scholars of religion have argued that the rhetorical form of speaking in terms of grand oppositional conflicts is typical for a religious imaginary. Think about Christian apocalypticism and images of the battles of god and evil during the end times. According to Mark Juergensmeyer, a scholar of religious terrorism, all religions

12 Cynthia H. Enloe, "Women and Children: Making feminist sense of the Persian Gulf Crisis," *The Village Voice* 19, no. 2 (1990): 51–52, at 51.

13 Samira Saramo, "The Metaviolence of Trumpism," *European journal of American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2017), https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/12129, ¶2, 10.

14 Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Doron Taussig, "Disruption Demonization, Deliverance, and Norm Destruction: The Rhetorical Signature of Donald J. Trump," *Political Science Quarterly* 132, no. 4 (2017): 619–650, at 625.

project a vision of un-mediated cosmic oppositions into the world.[15] I doubt that this is the case in all religious speech or thought, but we can certainly find such grand oppositions in some forms of Christianities. There is Christian precedent for the apocalyptic tropes of a grand battle between the forces of the good and the forces of the bad that characterizes the form of Trumpist rhetoric. Indeed, Trump colors these oppositional forces by incessantly mobilizing racist and anti-Muslim sentiments. He gives religious content to the form. As the sociologist Mary Romero notes: "Trump's binary worldview—good versus evil, the West versus Islam, 'shithole' countries versus those sending desirable immigrants—is present in all his communication, from official speeches to inflammatory tweets."[16] Andrew Whitehead and his colleagues list a number of instances when Trump presents himself as the savior of Christian America. For example, at a meeting of "Great Faith Ministries International on September 3, 2016, Trump said, 'Now, in these hard times for our country, let us turn again to our Christian heritage to lift up the soul of our nation.'"[17] At other meetings with Evangelical supporters, he talked about bringing Christianity "back" and of protecting Christians from undue restrictions of their religious liberty.[18] "As long as I am your president no one is ever going to stop you from practicing your faith or from preaching what's in your heart. We will always stand up for the right of all Americans to pray to God and to follow his teachings."[19] During Trump's first campaign event after the inauguration, religious and political fervor blends in the singing of God Bless America and in the praying of the Lord's Prayer.

Trump's rhetoric presents him as the savior not simply of America but of a particularly threatened Christian America. In the world of Trump's words, a mix of peoples who are alien to its nature threaten this fragile Christian America: Godless liberals, as well as Latin American, Chinese, or African migrants, and Muslims. Trump's rhetoric is successful because it "invoke[s] anxieties surrounding the weakening of nationalism and the threat of infiltration from

15 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).Comparative studies in religion and society, (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 2000

16 Mary Romero, "Trump's Imigration Attacks, in brief," *Contexts* 17, no. 1 (2018): 34–41, at 34.

17 Andrew L Whitehead , Samuel L Perry, and Joseph O Baker, "Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election," *Sociology of Religion* 79, no. 2 (2018): 157–171, at 152.

18 Whitehead , Perry, and Baker, "Make America Christian Again," 152.

19 Whitehead , Perry, and Baker, "Make America Christian Again," 151, fn. 1.

racially, ethnically, and nationally marked 'othered' bodies."[20] We should add to this list religiously marked 'othered' bodies.

Presenting "the border" as the space where the friend/enemy distinction establishes a sense of moral identity of the people is straight out of a Schmittian or Mouffian playbook. Accordingly, we should not be surprised that Trumpism is not only patriarchal but also violently so. As Samaro points out, his rhetoric creates a world that legitimizes "fear, threats, aggression, hatred, and division."[21] Indeed, the power of the law does not affect him. He can confess to sexually assaulting women, celebrate being able to kill in open daylight with impunity, and admit to tax evasion.[22] In the world created by Trump's words, this type of raw and unrestrained power is encoded as desirable and as necessary. And only the father can wield it.

Hand in hand with the arousal and inciting of patriarchal violent erotic power goes the rhetorical denial, the claim that Trump is "joking" or various forms of "accountability dodging," in the words of Jamieson and Taussig.[23] Given the Mouffian framework of the passionate politics of the arousal of antagonism and agonism, we should expect so much. Trumpist rhetoric has to create a sexualized violent animus *ad extram* against the nation's outside enemies and, at the same time, marshal and discipline that violence *ad intram* against his political adversaries.

This rhetorical alchemy is complicated by the fact that 'the border' is not a place but a constitutive element of the people, spread over them. As Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us: "The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."[24] The 'enemy' is always 'inside' and 'friends' may be hit by fire designed for the 'enemy.' It makes sense that in the world of Trumpism, enemy designations can shift fluidly: Barack Obama can be a Muslim because he is Black; or Syrian Muslims are funneled

20 Stephanie L. Gomesz, "'Not White/Not Quite': Racial/Ethnic Hybridity and the Rhetoric of the 'Muslim Ban,'" *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 8, no. 1/2 (2018): 72–83, at 76.

21 Saramo, "The Metaviolence of Trumpism," ¶2.

22 Jon Huer, *Donald Trump Made in the U.S.A.: A Study in Consumer Capitalism, Mental Trash, and the Privatization of White America* (New York, NY: Hamilton Books, 2017), 43; Hal Foster, "Père Trump," *OCTOBER* 159, no. Winter (2017): 3–6.

23 Jamieson and Taussig, "Disruption Demonization, Deliverance, and Norm Destruction: The Rhetorical Signature of Donald J. Trump," 620, 631–632.

24 Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: aunt lute, 1987), 1.

via Mexico; women in the Democratic party enable terrorism, and everyone who is not White is a terrorist.[25] The blended affective registers of animus and eros escape a clear outside/inside demarcation. Consequently, the sexualization of the border affects not only bodies that are imagined as the external enemy 'other' to the people. To the degree that the border is sexualized in passionate politics, sexuality itself and particularly women's reproductive bodies must be conceived of as a borderland that must be policed.

3.2 *Controlling Sexuality* ad Intram

This violent erotics of national borders could be easily avoided, if a nation reproduced itself through migration. Indeed, contrary to the discursive focus on threatening men penetrating the U.S. border, migration to the U.S. from the South has increasingly become feminized. As Women and Gender studies scholar Laura Brigg notes, it is mainly women with their children who migrate to the U.S. from Middle and South America.[26] They do so in desperate attempts to leave the poverty and violence of their homes behind. Once in the US, many end-up providing the work of care and housework that mostly white middle-class women in the U.S. need them to do. These middle-class women are overwhelmed and can afford assistance in their reproductive labor because they have to work outside of the house in order to make their families financially viable.[27] Thus, the migration of women who help women rearing children could be an easy solution to the problem of how to reproduce America, were it not for the demands of ethnic or cultural citizenship. The bodies of women entering the U.S. are encoded as the 'wrong kind.' They are not White Protestant Christian women. Policing outside borders and policing women's bodies inside the nation are two sides of the same coin: nations aim to control their reproductive futures.

The requirement that women reproduce the nation ethnically and culturally has consequences for their standing as citizens. Nominally, men and women are supposed to be equal in their citizenship rights. Indeed, despite the absence of an equal rights amendment, discrimination based on sex is prohibited by U.S. law. And yet, in their reproductive capacity, women's bodies are policed in a special manner.

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25 Saramo, "The Metaviolence of Trumpism," ¶16.

26 Laura Briggs, *How all Politics Became Reproductive Politics: from Welfare Reform to Foreclosure to Trump* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 233.

27 Claudia Goldin, "The Richard T. Ely Lecture: The Quiet Revolution That Transformed Women's Employment, Education, and Family," *AEA PAPERS AND PROCEEDINGS* 96, no. 2 (2006): 1–21.

All democratic states face the problem of how to reproduce the people as sovereigns 'correctly' and thus share in the need to control women's bodies. Yuval-Davis notes that women in democracies exist in two bodies, their private and public bodies. On the one hand, all citizens, including those designated as women, are considered equal in their right to participate in the economic and political life of the nation and to shape it. In this sense, their bodies are private. At the same time, the nation's reproductive needs require women's bodies to be controlled by the urgency to reproduce the sovereign people correctly. In this sense, every woman's reproductive body is public property.

While this is the case for any society, three characteristics of current U.S. politics intensify this need to control women's reproductive bodies as public property. First, as we have already seen, a democracy's urgency to reproduce the people according to its perceived ethnic or cultural identity by producing an eroticized animus of enmity. Second, the privatization of the costs of reproduction in the U.S.[28] And third, the move of the U.S. towards a market society, where any social interaction is conceived of in terms of economic rationality.[29] The first characteristic blocks of reproducing the people via migration; the second and third make it irrational for women in the U.S. to voluntarily take on the burden of reproduction.

This political need within the U.S. political landscape presents an opportunity structure for particular Christian anti-abortion and reproductive theologies to become salient. Additionally, there is a need for indirect control of women's bodies. Those who promote an identitarian White Christian character of the body politic under conditions of a neoliberal economy must present a framework that incentivizes Christian women to have and raise children as part of their private pursuit of happiness. Let me start with the former opportunity and end this section by discussing the latter.

The novel theology of "gender complementarity" produced by an odd coalition of White Evangelical and Roman Catholic elites serves to maintain this double life of women—and it is in turn served by this political urgency. Importantly, "gender complementarity" is a doctrinal innovation that emerges out of international networks of cooperation between elite Evangelical and Roman Catholic actors and institutions.[30] As I have traced in previous work, women

28 Ann Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood: Why the most Important Job in the World is still the Least Valued* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001).

29 Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

30 Sara Garbagnoli, "Against the Heresy of Immanence: Vatican's 'Gender' as a New Rhetorical Device Against the Denaturalization of the Sexual Order," *Religion & Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016):

are encouraged to be competitive and leaders in the world of business and, to a degree, in that of politics.[31] At the same time, they have to be submissive to their husbands in the home. In general, the Evangelical and Catholic discourse of "gender-complementarity" aims to present a sexual order where equality and submissions co-exist. In another surprising theological alliance, both white Evangelicals and Catholic elite theologies agree that the goal of marriage is biological reproduction. And since women and men are unequally situated on this account, the theo-politics of gender-complementarity allows that women and women are treated differently in the sphere of law, if it comes to issues of reproduction. By making the reproduction into a central goal, demand, and desire for married life, these types of Christianity provide anthropological and theological incentives for women to take on the burden of reproductive labor.

These White American Christian theologies of gender and sexuality respond to a political opportunity structure arising out of the need to reproduce the sovereign people. At the same time, the systemic urgency that the logic of democracy produces presents White American Christianity with an opportunity to imbricate itself into the body politic. Given this imbrication of Christian theology and given that the economics of child rearing in the U.S. make national reproduction of the sovereign people particularly precarious, it is not surprising to find an increased need to use the police power of the state to control women's bodies, through various abortion and 'fetal personhood' laws. The racial and classed nature of the application of these laws results in making reproduction even more dangerous and costly for minoritized women.

By making the bodies of particularly poor and racially minoritized women into reproductive problem zones, the legal framing of opposing a fetus with their delinquent mother contributes further to the privatization of reproductive labor. In this framing, the mother's private choices endanger the child. She fails her offspring because of problematic moral and life choices. At the same time, the bodies of minoritized women are persecuted, policed, and further marked as unruly, threatening the 'natural' reproductive order of the nation.

Hand in hand with this encroachment of religiously sanctioned state power goes an equally religiously sanctioned retraction of state power: the creation of spaces that are exempt from public mandates to provide women with medical care enabling reproductive choice. Through religious liberty legislation and jurisprudence, Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court have created a "huge

187–204; Mary Anne Case, "The Role of the Popes in the Invention of Complementarity and the Vatican's Anathematization of Gender," *Religion & Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016): 155–172.

31 Ludger Viefhues-Bailey, *Between a Man and a Woman? Why Conservatives Oppose Same-Sex Marriage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

religious zone where the employment laws do not apply and individuals lose their constitutional and statutory rights."[32] This is a zone of 'private' spaces that protects the sincerely held religious beliefs of religious institutions and closely held private companies. In a 2018 ruling the Trump administration extended these exemptions to cover sincerely held "moral" beliefs and moreover to apply also to publicly traded companies. [33]

The religious or moral beliefs in questions concern in particular the gendered nature of reproduction. The alliance between White Evangelicals and U.S. Catholics managed to incentives reproduction for some women, restrict all women's access to birth control and abortion, while increasing the costs of having children for minoritized women. Hence, gender complementarity appears as a tool well suited for the reproductive needs of a democratic nation following the logic of democracy under the condition of a neoliberal market society. It allows Christian denominations to claim that they acknowledge the equality of the sexes, and at the same time to assert that this equality does not lead to universally equal treatment before the law. Gender Complementary supports the creation of the two bodies of women for the sake of national reproduction.

4 Democracies Must Control Women's Bodies

As I mentioned before, the nation could reproduce itself through migration. Yet, this prospect threatens the antagonistic demarcation *ad extram*. 'We' cease to be distinguishable from 'them.' The nation's future as this particular (White) American nation is at stake. This is the core of the hard-right fear of 'replacement,' the idea that the Euro-American settler population is being replaced by culturally alien migrants. Proponents of this theory, like the Republican congressman Steven Arnold King, connect this fear to the providing of contraception through the mandates of Obamacare. Such a provision would drive down the American birth rate below that necessary to keep the allegedly autochthonous population at a stable level. To ward off this feared replacement of

32 Leslie C. Griffith, "A Word of Warning from a Woman: Arbitrary, Categorical, and Hidden Religious Exemptions Threaten LGBT Rights," *Alabama Civil Rights & Civil Liberties Law Review* 7 (2015): 97–128, at 98.

33 Department of Health and Human Services, "Fact Sheet: Final Rules on Religious and Moral Exemptions and Accommodation for Coverage of Certain Preventive Services Under the Affordable Care Act," https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2018/11/07/fact-sheet-final-rules-on-religious-and-moral-exemptions-and-accommodation-for-coverage-of-certain-preventive-services-under-affordable-care-act.html. (accessed August 10, 2020).

American families by aliens, the nation has to intervene where the reproductive choice happens, namely, in the allegedly private sphere of the family. Here is the urgency for an allegedly private mechanism of controlling and incentivizing women's reproduction. The need to define the nation *ad extram* leads to the urgency to marshal *ad intram* the powers of women's bodies to reproduce the nation—and to control them.

At a time when neoliberal globalization made the replacement of labor less pressing for capital and national sovereignty weakened, unreproductive sexual passions could be folded into the maintenance of the state in some cases. Yet, even if employers and global capital do not require national reproduction, the democratic state needs it. Sexual passions are part of the political and Christian hetero-patriarchy stands ready to incite and domesticate them.

CHAPTER 12

The Persistence of White Christian Patriarchy in a Time of Right-Wing Populism

Esther McIntosh

In 2016, two unexpected election results shook the U.S. and the U.K. (or, rather, the results horrified half of the population and delighted the other half): Donald Trump became President and Britons voted to leave the European Union in a referendum spearheaded by the U.K. Independence Party and Nigel Farage (now leader of the Brexit Party/Reform U.K.). Media and political commentary on both the presidential election campaign in the U.S. and the leave campaign in the U.K. made frequent references to the rise of populism. Populism can, of course, be left-wing or right-wing and can take many forms from militarism to pacifism, conservatism to socialism. Dutch political scientist, Cas Mudde, defines populism as: "*an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, '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*."[1] He notes that these movements are frequently facilitated by a charismatic leader, who claims to stand with the people and against the establishment, challenging taboos and capitalizing on a perceived threat to a particular way of life.[2] In other words, contemporary populist parties claim to be speaking on behalf of the "silent majority" who feel threatened by government regulation, culture change, and incoming migrants.[3]

We do not have to look very hard to find evidence of these markers in the rhetoric used by Donald Trump and Nigel Farage. Trump's campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" suggested a nostalgia for a lost way of life; his promise to "drain the swamp" implied that there is corruption at the heart of government; his promise to "build a wall" portrayed immigrants as threatening

1 Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition*, 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–563, at 543 (italics in the original). 'People' is a vague term and may only refer to a particular group.

2 Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 545–554. He explains: "*perception*s seem to be more important than *facts*" (Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 553, italics in the original).

3 Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 557. These populists do not want to overthrow liberal democracy; they intend a form of democracy that is more illiberal towards minorities.

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the way of life for resident Americans; while his attack on the establishment included inciting the "lock her up" chant aimed at Hillary Clinton and the accusation that journalists pedal "fake news" and are "the enemy of the American people."[4] Despite being a billionaire, Trump portrays himself as an outsider in relation to the corrupt elite and, therefore, is viewed by supporters as a spokesman for the forgotten people.[5]

Similarly, Farage glosses over his background as a merchant banker, preferring to be pictured in a pub with a pint of ale. His supporters claim that he is "in touch with" and "stands up for ordinary people";[6] in fact, he referred to UKIP supporters and now refers to Brexiteers as "The People's Army."[7] Like Trump, Farage employs nostalgia and anti-establishment tropes referring to out-of-touch politicians and an inefficient, corrupt, and undemocratic European Union; he blames the EU for, in his words, "flooding" the U.K. with migrants,[8] and, thus, maintains that leaving the EU will re-establish national sovereignty, restore Britishness (which seems to mean Englishness),[9] and will halt what he terms "Islamification."[10]

Through an exploration of the aforementioned campaigns, this chapter engages in a critical analysis of the rhetoric used by politicians and church leaders, and its effect on women. By exposing the gendered impact of austerity and the misogyny of White Christianity, the chapter finds that theologians need to do more to challenge government policies that exacerbate poverty and to critique patriarchal theology that diminishes women's voices and concerns.

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4 Jim Acosta, "How Trump's 'Fake News' Rhetoric has Gotten Out of Control," *CNN*, June 11, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/11/politics/enemy-of-the-people-jim-acosta-donald-trump/index.html (accessed July 5, 2019).

5 Anthony Scaramucci, "Grassroots America Shows the People Support Donald Trump," *The Hill*, April 19, 2019, https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/439705-grassroots-america-shows-the-people-support-donald-trump (accessed July 5, 2019).

6 See the statistics by YouGov, "Nigel Farage," https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/explore/public_figure/Nigel_Farage (accessed July 5, 2019).

7 Simon Hattenstone, "'We're Reactivating the People's Army': Inside the Battle for a Hard Brexit," *The Guardian*, January 12, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/12/were-reactivating-the-peoples-army-inside-the-battle-for-a-hard-brexit (accessed July 5, 2019).

8 David Deacon and Dominic Wring, "The UK Independence Party, Populism and the British News Media: Competition, Collaboration or Containment?," *European Journal of Communication* 31, no. 2 (2016): 169–184.

9 Richard Hayton, "The UK Independence Party and the Politics of Englishness," *Political Studies Review* 14:3 (2016): 400–410. Farage is critical of Welsh and Scottish nationalism and of devolution.

10 Andrew J. Mycock and Richard Hayton, "The Party Politics of Englishness," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 16, no. 2 (2014): 251–72.

In keeping with liberation theology, the preferential option for the poor requires that church leaders mount a robust response to right-wing populism and the co-opting of evangelical Christianity for political gain. Moreover, an effective response necessitates self-reflection on and redressing of White male privilege, so as to eradicate sexism and racism.

1 Donald Trump and White Evangelicals[11]

Following the successful election campaign of Trump to become President of the U.S., terms such as "fake news,"[12] "post-truth,"[13] and "alternative facts"[14] became commonplace. Analysis by the fact-checking site Politifact revealed that "144 of Trump's 274 fact-checked statements [were] false" compared with only "33 of Clinton's 263 fact-checked statements."[15] Trump's lies were no secret, yet, in spite of the Christian emphasis on truthfulness to be found in biblical verses such as "and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32, NRSV) and the commandment not to lie: "you shall not bear false witness" (Exod. 20:16, NRSV), much of his electoral support came from and is still found amongst White evangelical communities.[16] An unlikely association between evangelicals and Republicans can be traced back four decades to the presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan. This union is somewhat

11 'Evangelical' is a contested term, but it refers broadly to conservative Christians who place great emphasis on the Bible and on proselytizing and conversion, as such, evangelicals are often seen as counter cultural.

12 Danielle Kurtzleben, "With 'Fake News' Trump Moves from Alternative Facts to Alternative Language," *National Public Radio*, February 17, 2017, http://www.npr.org/2017/02/17/515630467/with-fake-news-trump-moves-from-alternative-facts-to-alternative-language (accessed February 20, 2017).

13 Alison Flood, "'Post-truth' Named Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/15/post-truth-named-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries (accessed February 20, 2017).

14 Jon Swaine, "Donald Trump's Team Defends 'Alternative Facts' After Widespread Protests," *The Guardian*, January 23, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/22/donald-trump-kellyanne-conway-inauguration-alternative-facts (accessed February 20, 2017).

15 Helen Lewis, "Post-Truth Politics," *Nieman Reports*, November 18, 2016, http://nieman,reports.org/articles/post-truth-politics/ (accessed February 28, 2017); see http://www.politifact.com for the latest tallies.

16 Since his election, several books have been published claiming that Trump is God's messenger, despite his flaws; see, for instance, Stephen E. Strang, *God and Donald Trump* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2017) and Mark Taylor, *The Trump Prophesies* (Crane, MO: Defender, 2017).

surprising considering Reagan's initially liberal stance on abortion and same-sex relations; nevertheless, he garnered evangelical support by declaring himself to be pro-life and a holder of traditional moral values.[17] As Daniel Williams recalls: "In 1980, 67 percent of white evangelical voters supported Reagan, and when he ran for reelection in 1984, that figure increased to 76 percent."[18] Under the Reagan Administration, nearly 90,000 people died of AIDS while pleas for presidential action went unheeded, same-sex marriage remained illegal and the 'gag-rule' was introduced preventing healthcare professionals who receive federal funds from discussing abortion or referring pregnant women to abortion providers. Furthermore, Reagan's racist stance cannot be ignored. He opposed the Civil Rights Act and openly supported South African apartheid, a regime which former Archbishop Desmond Tutu calls "evil and unchristian."[19] Tutu is unequivocal in his disdain for Reagan whom he describes as "the pits as far as blacks are concerned."[20] Against this backdrop, perhaps it is not as surprising as it might otherwise seem that Trump's openly misogynistic[21] and racist remarks during his presidential campaign appeared not to decrease his evangelical support base; even women in White evangelical Christian communities continued to acknowledge their support for Trump and to make light of his sexist remarks.

Outside of evangelical Christianity, social media enabled a groundswell of counter-movements with women's marches spreading across the world in protest against Trump's inauguration. In outlook, the marches were candidly pro-choice, fearful that Trump's promises to make abortion illegal would come

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17 Prior to his presidential campaign, Reagan supported the liberalizing of abortion law and rejected attempts to prevent homosexuals teaching in schools, but during his campaign he spoke out against repealing anti-gay laws and referred to abortion as ending life. See Daniel K. Williams, "Reagan's Religious Right: The Unlikely Alliance Between Southern Evangelicals and a California Conservative," in *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s*, ed. Cheryl Hudson and Gareth Davies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 135–149, at 136.

18 Williams, "Reagan's Religious Right," 135.

19 Tutu, cited in John Allen, *Rabble-Rouser for Peace: The Authorised Biography of Desmond Tutu* (New York: The Free Press, 2006), 256.

20 Tutu, cited in Allen, *Rabble-Rouser for Peace*, 260.

21 Kate Manne's distinction between sexism and misogyny is instructive here: she argues that misogyny does not refer to the hatred of all women, but rather to the hatred and control of women who challenge male dominance; women (especially White women) who conform to patriarchal norms of submission and femininity, however, are rewarded by powerful White men. Sexism is the ideology that women are weaker, more nurturing and so on, because they are women. Misogyny reinforces sexism in defense of male privilege. See Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

to fruition, thereby curtailing women's reproductive rights. Women and men from a diverse range of Christian denominations and other faith perspectives were amongst the marchers,[22] except, that is, for evangelicals who stayed away on the grounds of their opposition to abortion rights.[23] It seems that, when ranked on the basis of their significance to evangelicals and Republicans, the pro-life stance of the President is held to be of greater importance than respect for women; a stance that was further advanced by his promise to fill the vacant Supreme Court seat with a conservative justice. This is not to imply that evangelical women approve of Trump's misogyny or eschew all forms of equality; rather, even those advocating equal pay and wider access to healthcare, and appalled by Trump's treatment of women, may hold to pro-natalist views to the extent that, in Hannah Anderson's words, "abortion was likely THE issue to tip the scales for evangelical women to vote Trump."[24]

Following the release of the video in which Trump was recorded bragging about "pussy grabbing," a handful of evangelical leaders were seen to distance themselves from the Trump campaign, but widespread condemnation from evangelicals was not forthcoming. On the contrary, Robert Jeffress, a Baptist minister, performed a remarkable feat of cognitive dissonance, both acknowledging that Trump's behavior towards women is "lewd, offensive and indefensible" and continuing to advocate that his congregation vote for him; whereas, other Christian leaders, such as David Brody of the Christian Broadcasting Network, normalized and excused Trump's behavior by tweeting "We ALL sin every single day."[25] Catholic bishops and other religious leaders were willing to give voice to criticisms of Trump's policy banning refugees and migrants

22 Carol Kuruvilla and Antonia Blumberg, "Why these People of Faith are Marching for Women this Weekend," *The Huffington Post*, January 23, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-these-people-of-faith-are-marching-for-women-this-weekend_us_58812f2de4b096b4a230b46c (accessed February 20, 2017).

23 Rebecca Nelson, "The Women Who Won't March: 'Silenced' Conservatives Vow to Stay Home," *The Guardian*, January 19, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/19/womens-march-washington-conservative-tomi-lahren (accessed February 20, 2017).

24 Kate Shellnutt, "Women's March Sets Out to Exclude 40 Percent of American Women," *Christianity Today*, January 18, 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/january/womens-march-sets-out-to-exclude-40-percent-of-american-wom.html (accessed February 20, 2017).

25 Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "'Still the Best Candidate': Some Evangelicals Still Back Trump Despite Lewd Video," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/10/08/still-the-best-candidate-some-evangelicals-still-back-trump-despite-lewd-video/?utm_term=.fc911734cef8 (accessed February 20, 2017).

from seven, predominately Muslim, countries,[26] but remained largely silent on Trump's attitudes towards women.

Given the glow in which Trump appeared to bask, it is disappointing rather than astonishing that the prospect of a female president was not an overwhelming vote winner amongst women, despite Clinton's promotion of women's rights. Alec Tyson and Shiva Maniam note that: "Women supported Clinton over Trump by 54% to 42%. This is about the same as the Democratic advantage among women in 2012 (55% Obama vs. 44% Romney) and 2008 (56% Obama vs. 43% McCain)."[27] Thus, while more women did vote for Clinton than Trump, the gender gap in voting preferences between Republicans and Democrats was only slightly worse for Trump than in previous presidential campaigns, even though the possibility of a female president was expected to attract a greater share of the female vote, and even though he spoke of women with derision.

Hence, the relentless defamation of Clinton entwined with an acceptance of sexism amongst evangelicals proved to be a winning combination in securing Trump's victory in the presidential campaign. While Clinton undoubtedly made mistakes in her campaign, and carried a substantial measure of disrespect from feminist quarters for standing by Bill Clinton after the unequal power dynamics in his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky became public, she was clearly held to a higher standard than Trump. Much of Clinton's campaign was overshadowed by an FBI investigation into whether or not the use of her private email server constituted a dangerous mishandling of classified information (an accusation for which she was eventually cleared). Trump, however, somehow shrugged off multiple accusations of sexual misconduct,[28] whilst referring to Mexican immigrants as "rapists,"[29] and yet his campaign

26 CNS, "Trump's Action Banning Refugees Brings Outcry from US Church Leaders," *Catholic News Service*, January 30, 2017, http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2017/trumps-action-banning-refugees-brings-outcry-from-us-church-leaders.cfm (accessed February 20, 2017).

27 Alec Tyson and Shiva Maniam, "Behind Trump's Victory: Divisions by Race, Gender, Education," *Pew Research Center*, November 9, 2016, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/ (accessed January 31, 2017).

28 Alan Yuhas, "Woman Who Accused Donald Trump of Raping Her at 13 Drops Lawsuit," *The Guardian*, November 5, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/04/donald-trump-teenage-rape-accusations-lawsuit-dropped (accessed February 28, 2017).

29 Washington Post Staff, "Full Text: Donald Trump Announces a Presidential Bid," *The Washington Post*, June 16, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/?utm_term=.7f6152463750 (accessed February 28, 2017).

confidence was unshaken. Even amongst evangelical supporters, Trump was a Teflon figure whose 'sins' simply slipped away; he occupied a gilded pedestal surrounded by those prepared to extend Christian forgiveness to any and all of his discriminatory remarks and baseless accusations but to none of Clinton's flaws. Moreover, for growing numbers of evangelicals, Trump's transgressions, rather than making him a less desirable president, actually function to confirm a belief, based on the notion that God works with imperfections, that he is God's chosen president of America.[30]

In voting for Trump, large numbers of White evangelicals have demonstrated that Christian patriarchy and White privilege are alive and well. Moreover, while women should not be singularly blamed for absorbing the incessant messages of White male superiority, by acquiescing they become complicit in perpetuating sexism, and in this they are not blameless. Across Christian traditions, women are taught to be submissive (often based on Eph. 5:22–24)[31] on the grounds that they have different (but allegedly equal) roles: this is a complementarity thesis that merely disguises inequality and keeps women out of positions of power within the church. Emphasis on male headship is such that the ordination of women remains a thorny issue for Catholics and conservative evangelicals (reliant on 1 Cor. 14:34).[32] Furthermore, the gap in equality of opportunity is widened by the policing of women's reproductive choices by Catholics and conservative evangelicals who insist that a fertilized egg is a person with a right to life.[33]

Internalized misogyny appears to enable women, primarily White women, "to vote against their own self-interest."[34] Suzanne Moore contends that "every

30 Eugene Scott, "Comparing Trump to Jesus, and Why Some Evangelicals Believe Trump is God's Chosen One," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/11/25/why-evangelicals-like-rick-perry-believe-that-trump-is-gods-chosen-one/ (accessed September 19, 2020).

31 "Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands" (NRSV).

32 "[W]omen should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate" (NRSV).

33 The CWA (Concerned Women for America) is a pro-life conservative evangelical group that claims to be anti-feminist and biblical. The CWA has praised Trump, stood by Brett Kavanaugh, and opposes the equality act and LGBT rights.

34 Suzanne Moore, "Why Did Women Vote for Trump? Because Misogyny is Not a Male-Only Attribute," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/commentisfree/2016/nov/16/why-did-women-vote-for-trump-because-misogyny-is-not-a-male-only-attribute (accessed February 28, 2017).

woman who dismissed Trump's treatment of women as just 'the way men are' has also defended a man in her own life who has done the same thing."[35] Thus, by supporting a populist President who waves away his boasts of sexually assaulting women (by labelling it 'locker room talk'), women who report male violence are likely to encounter disbelief and victim-blaming. Yet, considered from a different angle, maintaining the status quo may be in (some) women's self-interest: White women who perform womanhood by assisting White men in their achievements, colluding in the denial of sexism, receive rewards as a result of lending their support.[36]

In their effort to avoid being seen as difficult women and to appease White male leaders, White evangelical women have effectively restricted access to contraception and opposed positive discrimination for women;[37] they have aligned themselves with Christian denominations that have few female-led church congregations,[38] or with evangelical organizations where the status of high profile wives is dependent upon the even higher profile of their preacher husbands: they exist as their husband's helpmeet and in submission to him.[39] Evangelical White women have performed White femininity to retain stability and favor in their own lives, but, in so doing, opting for White male praise over female solidarity.[40]

There are dissenting voices from within the church prepared to call out the hypocrisy of Christian complicity in racist and misogynist populist political rhetoric. Franciscan Friar, Richard Rohr, states: "The evangelical support of Trump will be an indictment against its validity as a Christian movement for generations to come,"[41] while Episcopalian Reverend Gay Clark Jennings recollects: "For months, as the Republican nominee for president spewed hatred and contempt for women, people of color, and immigrants, the white church stood

35 Moore, "Why Did Women Vote for Trump?"

36 For more on the right kind of women, see Ludger Viefhues-Bailey, "Querying Populism by Queering Chantal Mouffe: Understanding Hetero-Patriarchal Populism," in this volume.

37 Pew Research Center, "Women and Leadership," January 14, 2015, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/01/14/women-and-leadership/ (accessed March 1, 2017).

38 David Masci, "The Divide Over Ordaining Women," *Pew Research Center*, September 9, 2014 http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/09/the-divide-over-ordaining-women/ (accessed March 1, 2017).

39 See Kate Bowler, *The Preacher's Wife* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

40 In so doing, they abandon African-American women. See Ruby Hamad, *White Tears Brown Scars* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing, 2019).

41 Richard Rohr, cited by Antonia Blumberg, "16 Tweets that Capture Why Some Christians Feel Betrayed After the Election," *Huffington Post*, November 10, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/16-tweets-that-capture-why-some-christians-feel-betrayed-after-the-election_us_5823b45ce4b0d9ce6fc0c350 (accessed April 3, 2017).

by and watched. The Twitter hashtag #whitechurchquiet bears witness to our silence."[42] Nevertheless, the propensity of White evangelicals, including women, to continue to treat with impunity Republicans accused of sexual misconduct with young girls was evidenced in 2017, when Roy Moore's bid for the U.S. Senate in Alabama attracted a high percentage of their vote. In the end, Moore lost to Democrat Doug Jones by a very small margin (1.63 percent); this was far from a wholesale rejection by Christians, rather, as Yonat Shimron reports, "80 percent of white born-again Christians voted for Moore—nearly identical to the 81 percent of evangelicals nationally who voted for Trump in 2016."[43]

In the same year as Moore's failed bid for Senate, female actors were breaking their silence on sexual abuse in the film industry; in particular, accusations against Harvey Weinstein were stacking up at a rapid pace. Publicly witnessing apparently wealthy, powerful, successful women reporting discrimination and abuse in the workplace opened up a space for women around the world to draw attention to the extent of the problem using the hashtag #MeToo (borrowed from an earlier campaign for sexual assault survivors, begun by African-American Tarana Burke in 2007). Sexual assault is not external to churches, however. Inspired by the Me Too Movement, Hannah Paasch and Emily Joy started the hashtag #ChurchToo for girls and women to share their stories of abuse by clergy and fellow Christians.[44] It was not only the rapidity with which the hashtag gathered pace that revealed the pervasiveness of the problem, the accounts therein highlighted the abject failure of Christian communities to acknowledge and support survivors. This failure is bound up with a number of theological motifs, including (as I have discussed elsewhere)[45] the maleness

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42 Gay Clark Jennings, "Why Reconciliation with President-Elect Trump May Be Impossible for Some Christians," *Religion News Service*, November 15, 2016, http://religionnews.com/2016/11/15/why-reconciliation-with-president-elect-trump-may-be-impossible-for-some-christians/ (accessed April 3, 2017).

43 Yonat Shimron, "Alabama Fallout: Does Character Count?," *The Gazette*, December 13, 2017, http://gazette.com/alabama-fallout-does-character-count/article/1617174 (accessed December 19, 2017).

44 Casey Quackenbush, "The Religious Community is Speaking Out Against Sexual Violence with #ChurchToo," *Time*, November 22, 2017, http://time.com/5034546/me-too-church-too-sexual-abuse/ (accessed April 8, 2018) and Hannah Paasch, "Sexual Abuse Happens In #ChurchToo – We're Living Proof," *Huffington Post*, December 4, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/sexual-abuse-churchtoo_us_5a205b30e4b03350e0b53131 (accessed April 8, 2018). Similar hashtags now exist for other religious groups, such as #MosqueMeToo for Muslims, and #GamAni for Jews.

45 See, for example, "The Concept of Sacrifice: A Reconsideration of the Feminist Critique," *International Journal of Public Theology*, 1, no. 2 (2007), 210–229; and "The Possibility of a Gender-Transcendent God: Taking Macmurray Forward," *Feminist Theology*, 15, no. 2 (2007), 236–255.

of God-language, complementarianism and female submission, and forgiveness; which, when coupled with an institutional leaning towards protecting the reputations of powerful men, instructs young girls abused by male leaders to repent of their own sexuality, to remain silent, to pray for and apologize to their abusers. Abuse by men has been whitewashed: perpetrators have been applauded and absolved for confessing, whilst continuing to hold positions of power over young girls and women. Commenting on the ongoing Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales (IICSA) and the hearings specifically relating to Christian organizations, Linda Woodhead concurs with the #ChurchToo accounts noting that "a faulty doctrine of forgiveness was used by abusers to salve their consciences, by church officials to move on without dealing with the problem, and by parishioners and clergy to marginalize 'unchristian' victims and whistleblowers."[46]

2 Brexit and White Christianity

Even before the result of the campaign for Britain to end its membership of the EU was cemented in the decision to hold a referendum on the issue, the rising tide of populist narrative was in abundance in the right-wing press. News headlines and right-wing politicians equated austerity with immigration in an attempt to turn the British public against the freedom of movement enjoyed by EU citizens.[47] In addition, in a populist bid to mobilize the animosity of the 'common' people against the EU, the 'Vote Leave' campaign portrayed the European Council (which directs the EU) as a band of unelected elites who siphon funds from the U.K. that would otherwise be spent on the National Health Service (NHS).[48] Farage, at the time leader of the U.K. Independence Party, claimed that queues on the motorway and waiting times for doctor's appointments were due to immigration,[49] while Boris Johnson (now Prime

46 Linda Woodhead, "Forget Culture. It's a New Theology We Need," *Church Times*, April 6, 2018, https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/6-april/comment/opinion/iicsa-forget-culture-new-theology-we-need (accessed April 8, 2018).

47 Stuart Gietel-Basten, "Why Brexit? The Toxic Mix of Immigration and Austerity," *Population and Development Review*, 42, no. 4 (2016): 673–680.

48 Greenberg Center for Geoeconomic Studies, "What Brexit Reveals About Rising Populism," *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 29, 2016, https://www.cfr.org/interview/what-brexit-reveals-about-rising-populism (accessed April 24, 2018).

49 Kevin Rawlinson, "Farage Blames Immigration for Traffic on M4 After No-Show at UKIP Reception," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/dec/07/nigel-farage-blames-immigration-m4-traffic-ukip-reception (accessed September 20, 2020).

Minister of the U.K.) toured the country in a red bus emblazoned with the words: "We send the EU £350 million a week, let's fund our NHS instead"; the figure was grossly misleading and it was unlikely that leaving the EU would result in a massive spend on the National Health Service.[50] On the contrary, the Conservative government's austerity measures drastically cut spending on public services, while the anti-EU rhetoric of the campaign exacerbated shortages in the NHS as thousands of European medics decided to leave the U.K. unsure of their right to work and fearful of increasing racist and xenophobic attacks in Britain.[51] Counter claims by the 'Vote Remain' campaign were, ultimately, unsuccessful; the vote to leave won by a narrow margin of 52 to 48, effectively cleaving the country into two, the antagonism between 'leavers' and 'remainers' leading to rifts amongst families, friends and colleagues. The then-Prime Minister David Cameron abruptly resigned. Shortly after Cameron's resignation, Boris Johnson, "the de facto leader of the Brexit campaign," removed himself from the leadership contest; a decision described in the Press as "a spineless dereliction of duty and act of betrayal."[52] A divided country began to realize that the government lacked a concrete plan for the next steps following the referendum.

Nearly sixty percent of Christians voted leave, according to polling by Lord Ashcroft,[53] despite the fact that the leave campaign employed divisive and dishonest tactics that stand in sharp contrast to the Christian motif of welcoming the stranger (see, for example, Deut. 10:19; Lev. 19:34, Mtt. 25:35–40; Heb. 13:1–3). In part this higher turnout for leave amongst Christians than amongst the general population has a demographic explanation: British Christians are more likely to be White and elderly when compared with the general population; in addition to which, amongst Anglicans there is a preference for right-wing

50 Anoosh Chakelian, "Boris Johnson Resurrects the Leave Campaign's £350m for NHS Fantasy," *New Statesman*, September 16, 2017, https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2017/09/boris-johnson-resurrects-leave-campaign-s-350m-nhs-fantasy (accessed September 20, 2020).

51 Daniel Boffey, "Record Numbers of EU Nurses Quit NHS," *The Guardian*, March 18, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/mar/18/nhs-eu-nurses-quit-record-numbers (accessed September 20, 2020).

52 The Newsroom, "YP Comment: A Spineless Dereliction of Duty and Act of Betrayal – Why Boris Turned His Back on No. 10," *The Yorkshire Post*, June 30, 2016, https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/politics/yp-comment-spineless-dereliction-duty-and-act-betrayal-why-boris-turned-his-back-no10-1795876 (accessed September 20, 2020).

53 Harry Farley, "Christians and Brexit: Did God Command the UK to Leave the EU?," *Christian Today,* June 28, 2016, https://www.christiantoday.com/article/christians.and.brexit.did.god.command.the.uk.to.leave.the.eu/89427.htm (accessed April 24, 2018).

political parties.[54] Further explanation, largely unexplored by commentators and academics, may rest with the male hierarchy of mainstream and fringe Christian communities.

Prominent figures in the Anglican church, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the bishops of Durham and Guilford, amongst others, openly supported the remain campaign, along with Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.[55] However, their input on the debate was far from robust or persuasive; it consisted mostly of hand-wringing at the prospect of departing from the EU, which left a vacuum ready to be filled by populist leave messages.[56] Shocked by the unexpected outcome of the vote, they expressed dismay and called for "unity" in what amounted to a rather opaque and mealy-mouthed assessment of the situation.[57] Notably absent from the majority of political and theological discourse during the Brexit campaign was any sustained analysis of the gendered implications of the vote, even though "86% of the burden of austerity since 2010 has fallen on women."[58] Austerity measures have a disproportionate effect on women, because women "are more likely to work in the public sector and to need public services."[59] Moreover, an independent report published by the Fawcett Society warns that a post-Brexit fall in economic growth will have negative consequences for already disadvantaged women. Cuts to public sector jobs, welfare benefits, affordable housing, reproductive healthcare, and refuges for survivors of domestic violence, reduce women's financial independence and increase women's vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. For these reasons, a striking headline in *The Guardian* read "Brexit is a feminist

54 Siobhan McAndrew, "How Members of Different Faith Communities Feel About UK Political Parties," *London School of Economics*, May 25, 2017, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/religion-and-party-liking/ (accessed September 20, 2020).

55 For further discussion of the theological underpinnings of Brexiteers, see Lukas David Meyer, "The God of the Brexiteers," in this volume.

56 Press Association, "Archbishop of Canterbury Supports Remain Campaign in EU Referendum," *The Guardian*, June 12, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/12/archbishop-of-canterbury-supports-remain-campaign-in-eu-referendum (accessed August 31, 2019).

57 Harry Farley, "Unity vs Defiance: Church Leaders Respond to Brexit," *Christian Today*, June 24, 2016, https://www.christiantoday.com/article/unity.vs.defiance.church.leaders.respond.to.brexit/89186.htm (accessed April 24, 2018).

58 Heather Stewart, "Women Bearing 86% of Austerity Burden, Commons Figures Reveal," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/09/women-bearing-86-of-austerity-burden-labour-research-reveals (accessed April 24, 2018).

59 Kathryn Snowdon, "Hard Brexit Will 'Adversely Impact Women,' Groundbreaking Report Finds," *Huffington Post*, March 27, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/brexit-impact-women-fawcett-society_uk_5ab8f513e4b054d118e4fe60 (accessed August 31, 2019).

issue," and, yet, as Helen Lewis highlights in the article, the debate between leavers and remainers was dominated by White male elites who appear to be ignorant of, or largely unconcerned by, financial and gender-based problems from which their privileged position in society shields them.[60] It was something of a joke to point out that, when the Brexit negotiating teams sat down together, the entirely White British team had "more beards than women" (and there were only a few beards).[61] Deeper analysis by the *Huffington Post* found that, whilst female MPs accounted for nearly thirty percent of the seats in the House of Commons, men's voices dominated ninety percent of the Brexit debate in Parliament.[62] Women, as a proportion of the population, are significantly underrepresented in U.K. politics;[63] even where women are represented, they face barriers of sexism and inequality in the workplace. Moreover, since protection from workplace discrimination presently relies on EU laws, there is no guarantee that the situation will improve after the U.K. leaves the EU.

A greater number of women in Parliament would increase the likelihood that issues negatively affecting women's lives, and policies that exacerbate them, would be challenged. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to assume that female politicians would necessarily improve the lives of women: both of the female Prime Ministers in the UK's parliamentary history, Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May, have fallen short in this regard. Thatcher filled her cabinet with men, reduced spending on welfare, and ignored pleas for childcare provision.[64] May presided over cuts to services and benefits that have made women's lives more precarious (despite her claims to the contrary).[65] Reassuringly,

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60 Helen Lewis, "Brexit is a Feminist Issue," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/mar/20/women-europe-referendum-debate-brexit (accessed April 24, 2018).

61 Siona Jenkins, "Is Brexit Bad for Women?," *Financial Times*, July 7, 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/a1ec120c-6307-11e7-91a7-502f7ee26895 (accessed April 24, 2018). Diversity on the EU side is only slightly better.

62 Rachel Wearmouth, "Exclusive: Men Spoke for 90% of the Debate on Brexit in Parliament – New Study," *Huffington Post*, October 11, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/male-mps-made-almost-90-of-speeches-on-brexit-in-westminster_uk_5bbdbf98e4b01470d0571081 (accessed August 31, 2019).

63 The Women and Equalities Committee, *Women in the House of Commons After the 2020 Election: Fifth Report of 2016–17* (London: House of Commons, 2017), available at https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/630/630.pdf (accessed August 31, 2019).

64 Linda McDowell, "Women in Thatcher's Britain," in *The Political Geography of Contemporary Britain*, ed. John Mohan (London: Palgrave, 1989), 172–186.

65 Maya Oppenheim, "Teresa May Rolled Back Women's Rights Say Campaigners," *Independent*, May 24, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/theresa-may-resign-womens-rights-austerity-benefits-conservative-leader-a8929141.html (accessed

Church of England bishops, alongside Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and other religious organizations have challenged the government on the so-called 'rape clause': a clause that restricts benefit claims to two children unless the claimant can prove that further children were conceived through rape. Whilst the challenge highlights the likely increase in both poverty and abortion that will result from the clause, it is concerning that religious disquiet appears to stem from a pronatalist drive to have large families rather than a deep critique of a government punishing women.[66]

In addition to defending the third child 'rape clause,' May contributed to the anti-immigration rhetoric of future populist campaigns with the controversial "go home" vans and the promotion of a 'hostile environment' for immigrants, deliberately inculcated in the U.K.[67] Admittedly, the phrase 'hostile environment' was introduced in 2010 by Labour's Home Secretary Alan Johnson before being developed by Theresa May whose stated aim, as Home Secretary in 2012, was to generate "a really hostile reception".[68] Several legislative changes then followed, granting the Home Office additional powers to deport rough sleepers from European Economic Area (EEA) countries, to demand immigration data from the NHS and educational facilities, to restrict access to work and to appeals, and to deport unaccompanied minors once they reached eighteen years of age (regardless of how many years they had lived in the U.K., and regardless of whether or not they had any persistent connections with their country of origin). It was only when what is now referred to as the "Windrush scandal" made mainstream news headlines in 2017, owing to the bravery of Paulette Wilson, that the true extent of the hostile environment became

September 20, 2020); see also The Week, "Fact Check: The Truth About British Funding for Women's Refuges," *The Week*, December 12, 2017, https://www.theweek.co.uk/90364/fact-check-the-truth-about-british-funding-for-women-s-refuges (accessed September 20, 2020).

66 Harriet Sherwood, "Scrap Two-Child Limit on Benefits, Say UK's Religious Leaders," *The Guardian*, April 6, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/06/scrap-two-child-limit-benefits-uk-religious-leaders-welfare (accessed September 20, 2020). For a discussion of this pronatalist drive in the U.S. context, see again Viefhues-Bailey, "Querying Populism by Queering Chantal Mouffe," in this volume.

67 Matthew Taylor, "'Go Home' Campaign Creating Climate of Fear, Say Rights Groups," *The Guardian*, August 8, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/aug/08/go-home-climate-of-fear-rights-groups (accessed September 30, 2020).

68 James Kirkup and Robert Winnett, "Theresa May Interview: 'We're Going to Give Illegal Migrants a Really Hostile Reception,'" *The Telegraph*, May 25, 2012, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/theresa-may-interview-going-give-illegal-migrants-really-hostile/ (accessed September 30, 2020).

apparent to the wider public.[69] Commonwealth citizens of Caribbean heritage suddenly found themselves deprived of healthcare and employment, evicted for rent arrears, detained and deported. Despite having a right to British citizenship and having lived and worked in the U.K. for decades, Black Britons referred to as the Windrush generation were required to provide documentary evidence that their residency predated 1973 in order to avoid been classed as 'undocumented migrants,' even though many had arrived as children and the Home Office had destroyed their landing cards.

As Maya Goodfellow reveals, anti-immigration policy is deeply rooted in Britain's colonial past. Moreover, it continues to feed populist rhetoric leading to racist and dehumanizing behavior.[70] Church leaders have been rightly outspoken in their condemnation of the Windrush scandal. For example, Bishop Christopher of the Anglican Diocese of Southwark spoke of his horror at learning that members of his congregation were facing the "grave injustice" of deportation;[71] Wale Hudson Roberts, Justice Coordinator to the Baptist Union, stated that "The Government's behaviour ha[d] been reprehensible";[72] Catholic Bishop Paul McAleenan insisted that:

> The Government must now restore the human dignity of those whose rights were violated. They must ensure that necessary emergency support is provided and compensation made. Most of all they must take steps to ensure that such mistakes which undermine one's God given value are never repeated.[73]

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69 'Windrush' refers to the HMT Empire Windrush ship which brought Caribbean migrants to the U.K. in 1948. Since the Caribbean was part of the British Commonwealth, the migrants were automatically British subjects with a right to live and work in the U.K. See also Amelia Gentleman, "Without Paulette Wilson, Windrush Might Have Remained Hidden," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/24/without-paulette-wilson-windrush-may-have-remained-hidden (accessed September 26, 2020).

70 Maya Goodfellow, *Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats* (London: Verso Books, 2019).

71 The Editor, "Bishops Speak Out for the 'Windrush' Children," *The Bridge: Newspaper of the Anglican Diocese of Southwark*, 23:4, May 4, 2018, 1–12, at 1, available at https://southwark.anglican.org/downloads/The%20Bridge/bridgemay2018.pdf (accessed August 31, 2019).

72 The Baptist Times, "Baptist Anger Over Windrush Crisis," *Baptist Times*, April 19, 2018, https://baptisttimes.co.uk/Articles/520133/Baptist_anger_over.aspx (accessed September 26, 2020).

73 The Catholic Church: Bishops Conference of England and Wales, "'Windrush Scandal Must Not Be Repeated,' says Bishop," *CBCEW*, June 21, 2019, https://www.cbcew.org.uk/windrush-scandal-must-not-be-repeated-says-catholic-bishop/ (accessed September 26, 2020).

Such outwardly directed critique, however, is of limited value if churches do not examine their own participation in and perpetuation of racism on both a practical and theological level.[74] In particular, the Church of England has been called to account for its "horrible and humiliating racism."[75] On arrival in the U.K., the Windrush generation did not find a warm welcome in all churches. Furthermore, more than fifty years since their arrival, there are hardly any Black bishops in the Church of England. Institutional racism in the Anglican Church is ever present; it has not been confined to history as both Rose Hudson-Wilkin, the first female Black bishop in the Church of England, and Azariah France-Williams, amongst others, attest.[76] In fact, Hudson-Wilkin's experience of the Church is of intersectional oppression: she has been subjected to both racism and sexism.[77] At its root, Anglicanism is entwined with White privilege, which gave succor to a notion of Englishness as White Christianity in the Brexit debate.[78]

Most notably, Farage's notorious 2016 'Breaking Point' poster depicted a long, winding queue of Syrian refugees crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border in 2015, captioned with the words "The EU has failed us all. We must break free of the EU and take back our borders." The poster was widely condemned for misrepresenting the plight of those fleeing war, conflating the UK's legal duty (under the Refugee Convention) to accept refugees with the free movement of European workers. Bonnie Greer implied that Farage was "deploying Nazi-style propaganda."[79] Farage's poster built upon language used by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, the previous year; Cameron had referred to those risking their

74 See Hannah Strømmen and Ulrich Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity: Responding to the Far Right* (London: SCM Press, 2020).

75 Harriet Sherwood, "Church of England Urged to Apologise for Windrush Racism," *The Guardian*, January 24, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/24/church-of-england-urged-to-apologise-for-windrush-racism (accessed September 26, 2020).

76 A. D. A. France-Williams, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England* (London: SCM Press, 2020).

77 Jonathan Owen and Emily Dugan, "Even Outstanding Women Struggle to Rise in the CofE," *Independent*, February 26, 2012 https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/even-outstanding-women-struggle-rise-cofe-7440944.html (accessed September 26, 2020).

78 See Anthony G. Reddie, *Theologising Brexit: A Liberationist and Postcolonial Critique* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 17–25.

79 Oliver Wright, "Nigel Farage Accused of Deploying Nazi-Style Propaganda as Remain Crash Poster Unveiling with Rival Vans," *Independent*, June 16, 2016, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/nigel-farage-brexit-poster-vans-eu-referendum-london-remain-breaking-point-a7085396.html (accessed September 26, 2020).

lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea as a "swarm" of migrants.[80] Yet, despite this reprehensible terminology, Christian leaders on the leave-side contributed to the anti-immigration rhetoric.

For instance, former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, equated pressures on resources, such as schools and the NHS, with "an unasked-for experiment in uncontrolled immigration," and he, like Farage and others in the leave campaign, connected the threat of terrorism in Europe with the freedom of movement in the EU.[81] Fringe evangelical leaders painted a picture of the European Union as unchristian and gave the impression that a vote to leave would result in a revival of Christianity in Britain. For example, Peter Horrobin, founder of Ellel Ministries in Lancashire, which has spread across the globe to twenty countries, referred to the U.K.'s membership of the EU as "an ungodly alliance," claiming that "it was not what God wanted for this Christian nation."[82] Horrobin's blog links the survival of soldiers at Dunkirk with the image of a British nation at prayer, and he laments the acceptance of the differing religious beliefs of migrants. He suggested that the referendum was "an opportunity for the whole nation to repent," insisting that it would be outside of the EU only that a British government could "bring the U.K. more in line with God's laws".[83]

Horrobin's opinion could be dismissed as an outlier railing against advances in multi-faith understanding, human rights, and sexual freedom, but views such as his gained traction in evangelical circles. At least one news article included a picture of an average redbrick house in the U.K. on the side of which, underneath a small Union Jack, huge painted letters read: "VOTE LEAVE E.U. REV. 18:4"; a blatant attempt to convince Christian voters of a biblical mandate for Brexit. Revelation 18:4 states: "Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues'" (NRSV).[84] Similarly, Joseph Munguti, who

80 BBC News, "David Cameron 'Swarm' of Migrants Crossing the Mediterranean," *BBC*, July 30, 2015, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-33714282 (accessed September 26, 2020).

81 Ruth Gledhill, "Former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey Comes Out in Support of Brexit," *Christian Today*, May 16, 2016 https://www.christiantoday.com/article/former-archbishop-of-canterbury-lord-carey-comes-out-in-support-of-brexit/86190.htm (accessed August 31, 2019).

82 See Peter Horrobin's blog post, "In or Out?", *Ellel Ministries*, March 24, 2016, http://blog.ellel.org/2016/03/24/in-or-out/ (accessed August 31, 2019).

83 Horrobin, "In or Out?"

84 For the image of the house, captured by Frank Witte and shared on Facebook, see Farley, "Christians and Brexit."

founded the Christian Truth Center in Louisville in 2012, draws on the fourth beast described in the Book of Daniel to claim that the beast's ten horns are the ten nations of the EU, and, further, that: "Brexit—the exit of Britain from EU is a clear sign that Antichrist is rising up in the EU. It is him who has plucked up Britain from the EU fulfilling Bible end time prophecy."[85] Since the referendum, these efforts to connect the European Union with sin, via comparison with Babylon and the nearing of the apocalypse as described in the Book of Revelation, have not disappeared. The United Church of God, founded in 1995 in Indianapolis, and claiming to have hundreds of congregations across the globe, states, in its magazine *Beyond Today*:

> The EU is currently an unwieldy superstate with individual nations seeking their own benefits before that of the whole group. Closer union could lead to a shared army, currency, banks and government—the same kind of cultural, social and financial unity represented by the Tower of Babel. Scripture does not reveal the detail of how the current configuration in Europe might morph into the end-time prophesied powerhouse of ten nations under one ruler controlling much of the world's economy. It is clear it will appear just a few years prior to the return of Jesus Christ and at a time of great economic and social upheaval.[86]

Such views extended beyond the fringe finding support amongst familiar public figures in America. Franklin Graham, President of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, whose festivals are attended by millions, referred to the outcome of the vote as a "glorious opportunity," borrowing the phrase from Boris Johnson;[87] this is the same Franklin Graham who is widely criticized for his homophobic and Islamophobic remarks.

Likewise, Jerry A. Johnson denounced the ungodliness of the EU constitution and suggested that the vote to leave represented an opportunity for

85 Joseph Munguti, "Brexit and Bible Prophecy: The Rise of the Antichrist," *Christian Truth Center*, no date but web archiving suggests this was first posted in July 2016, https://www.christiantruthcenter.com/brexit-and-bible-prophecy/ (accessed September 27, 2020).

86 David Fenney, "Babylon, Brexit and Why the Euro Zone Seeks Closer Union," *Beyond Today: British and European Supplement*, March-April 2019, available at http://ucg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Supplement-MarApr-2019.pdf (accessed August 31, 2019).

87 Mark Woods, "US Evangelicals Hail British Vote to Leave EU," *Christian Today,* June 27, 2016, https://www.christiantoday.com/article/us-evangelicals-hail-british-vote-to-leave-eu/89323.htm (accessed August 31, 2019); see also "Boris Johnson: We Have a Glorious Opportunity," *Sky News*, June 24, 2016, https://news.sky.com/story/boris-johnson-we-have-a-glorious-opportunity-10323641 (accessed November 10, 2020).

"a spiritual awakening" in the U.K.[88] He blamed the EU for forcing the U.K. to "admit large numbers of migrants" and "massive numbers of Muslims" across its borders.[89] Johnson is the President of the longstanding evangelical association of Christian communications, the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB). The NRB lays claim to reaching "millions of viewers, listeners and readers worldwide"; its mission is "to advance biblical truth," and fight against what it perceives to be the "emerging threats to the rights and freedoms of Christian broadcasters."[90] Christian freedom of speech, according to Johnson, is being curtailed by homosexuality and Islam; he is referring to the fact that broadcasters can be penalized for homophobic or Islamophobic comments.[91]

Thus, leave campaigners and supporters have irresponsibly stoked up anti-immigration and Islamophobic sentiments, blaming migrants for the underfunding of essential services, encouraging "natives" to turn against "foreigners," and harping back to a mythical time of prosperity and sovereignty when Britain supposedly had a monolithic culture and a single religion. The unwanted others in this scenario are the minorities who look or sound different from the majority, and who practice a religion other than Christianity. Hence, given the visibility of some women's Islamic dress—the hijab, the niqab or the burqa—Muslim women have become the primary targets of a notable rise in racial and religious hate crimes.[92]

Except for the Reverend George Pitcher, who, prior to the final ballot, called the Church of England "morally indolent and cowardly" for not making "a Christian case ... against Johnson"—"a serial liar, philanderer and shirker"[93]—thus

88 Woods, "US Evangelicals Hail British Vote to Leave EU," *Christian Today,* June 27, 2016.

89 Woods, "US Evangelicals Hail British Vote to Leave EU."

90 See http://nrb.org/about/our_mission/ (accessed July 5, 2019).

91 Jennie Law, "Christians' Freedom is Being Challenged by Homosexuality and Islam, says NRB Head," *The Christian Post*, February 28, 2017, https://www.christianpost.com/news/christians-freedom-is-being-challenged-by-homosexuality-and-islam-says-nrb-head-176199/ (accessed August 31, 2019).

92 See May Bulman, "Brexit Vote Sees Highest Spike in Religious Racial and Hate Crimes Ever Recorded," *The Independent*, July 7, 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/racist-hate-crimes-surge-to-record-high-after-brexit-vote-new-figures-reveal-a7829551.html (accessed September 30, 2019) for police statistics revealed following FOI requests; see also Sarah Marsh, "Record Number of Anti-Muslim Attacks Reported in UK Last Year," *The Guardian*, July 20, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jul/20/record-number-anti-muslim-attacks-reported-uk-2017 (accessed September 30, 2019) for impact on Muslim women recorded by Tell MAMA UK.

93 George Pitcher, "It's Time for Christians to Speak Out Against Boris Johnson," *The Guardian*, June 18, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/18/church-of-england-boris-johnson (accessed August 31, 2019).

far the leading voices in the Church of England[94] (and the Church of Scotland[95]) have been silent on the impact on women of having Johnson as the UK's Prime Minister. Prior to serving as Prime Minister, Johnson acted with ineptitude as Foreign Secretary damaging the plight of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe;[96] in addition, he made insulting and derogatory remarks referring to women wearing face veils "looking like letter boxes,"[97] which contributed to the normalizing of abuse and a rise in attacks against Muslim women.[98] Furthermore, he implied that veiled women resemble bank robbers; thus, feeding the right-wing narrative that Islam, and Muslim women in particular, are a threat.[99] Britain does not have the same prominence of evangelical Christian women supporting populism as can be seen in the U.S., but British women are still suffering under Christianity's patriarchal legacy. When evangelical leaders criticize the secularity of the EU and speak of Britain as a 'Christian-nation,' they leave Muslim women exposed to nationalistic rage. When church leaders ignore the gendered impact of any Brexit plan, they hide behind their male privilege and fail vulnerable women.

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94 See, for example, Tim Wyatt and Ed Thornton, "Church Leaders Warn Johnson About Consequences of No Deal," *Church Times*, July 25, 2019, https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/26-july/news/uk/church-leaders-warn-johnson-about-consequences-of-no-deal (accessed September 30, 2019) and The Church of England, 'Bishops Issue Open Letter on Brexit', July 28, 2019 https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/bishops-issue-open-letter-brexit (accessed September 30, 2019).

95 See, for example, The Church of Scotland, "Statement on the Prorogation of the UK Parliament," August 28, 2019, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news_and_events/news/2019/statement_on_the_prorogation_of_the_uk_parliament (30 September 2019).

96 See John Johnston, "Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's Husband Says Boris Johnson Gaffe Boosted Iran 'Propaganda,'" *Politics Home*, June 19, 2019, https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/conservative-party/news/104691/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffes-husband-says (accessed July 5, 2019).

97 See BBC Politics, "Johnson Faces Criticism Over Burka 'Letter Box' Jibe," August 6, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45083275 (accessed July 5, 2019).

98 Tell MAMA reports a spike in anti-Muslim crime, especially against veiled women, following Johnson's comments; see Nazia Parveen, "Boris Johnson's Burqa Comments 'Led to Surge in Anti-Muslim Attacks,'" *The Guardian*, September 2, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/sep/02/boris-johnsons-burqa-comments-led-to-surge-in-anti-muslim-attacks (accessed September 30, 2019).

99 Press Association, "Boris Johnson Cleared over Burqa Comments", *The Guardian*, December 20, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/20/boris-johnson-cleared-over-burqa-comments (accessed November 10, 2020).

3 Liberation Theology, COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter

We are at a critical juncture in our history: 2020 is both the year of a global pandemic and a renewed focus on racism via the Black Lives Matter movement; a movement started in 2013 by three women: Opal Tometi, Patrisse Cullors, and Alicia Garza. In a way, the Black Lives Matter movement is itself a form of populism;[100] in fact—driven by grassroots action that challenges institutional racism—we could refer to this as a truer form of populism than that with which it clashes, namely, the right-wing political 'populism' of Donald Trump.[101] Not only have the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, to name but two, fueled demands for a re-examination of police brutality against African-Americans; the higher death rate from COVID-19 amongst Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities in the U.K. has highlighted the fact that socio-economic depravation and unequal access to healthcare still runs on racial lines. Furthermore, despite deaths from COVID-19 being higher amongst men than women, the gendered impacts of lockdown once again demonstrate the persistence of patriarchy. During lockdown in the U.K. calls to domestic abuse helplines escalated by as much as eighty percent in some months;[102] more women than men found themselves out of work as employment in retail and hospitality shrank;[103] when schools closed, women—whether working full-time or not—found themselves responsible for more childcare and home schooling than

100 See Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016), 77–107. See also the Vincent Lloyd, "Anger: A Secularized Theological Concept," in this volume.

101 See Thomas Frank, *The People, No: A Brief History of Anti-Populism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020).

102 June Kelly and Sally Graham, "Coronavirus: Domestic Abuse Helpline Sees Lockdown Surge," *BBC News*, July 23, 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53498675 (accessed September 27, 2020); see also Sarah Davidge, Women's Aid, *A Perfect Storm: The Impact of the Coivd-19 Pandemic on Domestic Abuse Survivors and the Services Supporting Them* (Bristol: Women's Aid, 2020), available at https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-Perfect-Storm-August-2020-1.pdf (accessed September 27, 2020).

103 Anu Madgavkar, Olivia White, Mekala Krishnan, Deepa Mahajan, and Xavier Azcue state: "By our calculation, women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis than men's jobs. Women make up 39 percent of global employment but account for 54 percent of overall job losses" ("COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Countering the Regressive Effects," McKinsey Global Institute, July 15, 2020, https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects# [accessed September 27, 2020]).

men.[104] Yet, as the Fawcett Society asserts "women and girls in the U.K. have been largely invisible from the debate and excluded from decision-making,"[105] while in the U.S., an article in *The Lancet* reports that: "Despite the WHO Executive Board recognizing the need to include women in decision making for outbreak preparedness and response, there is inadequate women's representation in national and global COVID-19 policy spaces, such as in the White House Coronavirus Task Force."[106] In many countries, traditionally male occupations reopened before traditionally female occupations—construction workers returned to work before hairdressers, beauticians, and nursery nurses—and little consideration was given to the shortage of childcare.

COVID-19 is exacerbating gender and racial inequalities; furthermore, as countries struggle to deal with the crisis, illustrations of populism and nationalism, enmeshed with 'red pill' portents, continue to multiply: with Trump referring to the coronavirus as "kung flu,"[107] Jair Bolsonaro acting as figurehead for virus-deniers,[108] evangelical church leaders citing QAnon conspiracy

104 Several news agencies report a lack of gender equality in the division of labor at home during the pandemic: citing research by University College London, see Richard Adams, "Women 'Put Careers on Hold' to Home School During UK Coivd-19 Lockdown," *The Guardian*, July 30, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jul/30/women-put-careers-on-hold-to-home-school-during-uk-covid-19-lockdown (accessed September 27, 2020); for research by the *New York Times*, see Claire Cain Miller, "Nearly Half of Men Say They Do Most of the Home Schooling. 3 Percent of Women Agree," *The New York Times*, May 6, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/06/upshot/pandemic-chores-homeschooling-gender.html (accessed September 27, 2020); citing research by the London School of Economics, see Maya Oppenheim, "Coronavirus: Women Bearing Burden of Childcare and Homeschooling in Lockdown, Study Finds," *Independent*, May 14, 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-childcare-homeschooling-women-lockdown-gender-a9512866.html (accessed September 27, 2020).

105 Joint Statement by Women's Organisations, "Coronavirus: Joint Call for Women's Visibility in UK Response," *The Fawcett Society*, March 23, 2020, https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/coronavirus-joint-call-womens-visibility-uk-response (accessed September 27, 2020).

106 Claire Wenham, Julia Smith, and Rosemary Morgan, "COVID-19: The Gendered Impacts of the Outbreak," *The Lancet* 395:10227 (2020), 846–848, at 847.

107 Amanda Walker, "President Trump's Use of 'Kung Flu' Is Embodiment of Path He Has Chosen in Divided Times," *Sky News*, June 24, 2020, https://news.sky.com/story/president-trumps-use-of-kung-flu-is-embodiment-of-path-he-has-chosen-in-divided-times-12014064 (accessed September 27, 2020).

108 Uri Friedman, "The Coronavirus-Denial Movement Now Has a Leader," *The Atlantic*, March 27, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/03/bolsonaro-coronavirus-denial-brazil-trump/608926/ (accessed September 27, 2020).

theories alongside biblical passages,[109] and Johnson claiming that the U.K.'s test and trace operation would be "world beating."[110] Consequently, when a vaccination became available, evangelical Christians and others influenced by QAnon rejected it; amongst others, nationalistic tendencies risk shoring up resources rather than sharing them, hoarding supplies in wealthy nations rather than assisting those in poverty. From the perspective of liberation theology, such an approach is counter to the preferential option for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. In as much as liberation theology promotes the conscientization of the oppressed, it too is a populist movement, but one characterized by a socio-economic drive for justice and equality rather than an exclusionary and nationalistic ethos. Similarly, although not fully embracing socialism, Side By Side, the interfaith movement for gender justice, have issued a joint statement with the Anglican Communion in which they state: "As religious actors and networks of faith-based organizations, we are called to work together for gender equality and justice, amid global changes, rising nationalism, and conflict."[111] Addressing governments, the Statement asserts: "We advocate for the adoption of gender just policies and funding of COVID-19 response plans that holistically address the pandemic."[112] Such advocacy is welcome; a coordinated approach to ensuring that governments' recovery plans are gender aware is vital if we are to avoid widening the gender pay gap and increasing poverty. Nevertheless, the force of such a statement is weakened given the Church of England's own track record on gender inequality and its continued use of Provincial Episcopal Visitors (otherwise known as 'flying bishops') to appease those who oppose female ordination. Likewise, while church leaders were "outraged" when Trump posed with a Bible at St John's Episcopal Church in Washington D.C. endeavoring to co-opt Christian symbolism in opposition

109 Daniel Burke, "How QAnon Uses Religion to Lure Unsuspecting Christians", October 15, 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/15/us/qanon-religion-churches/index.html (accessed November 11, 2020). For a detailed discussion of the relations between populism and conspiracism, including QAnon, see Thomas Lynch, "'Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you': Populism, Political Theology, and the Culturally Repugnant Other," in this volume.

110 Alain Tolhurst and Eleanor Langford, "PMQs: Boris Johnson Claims UK Will Have 'World-Beating' System to Trace 10,000 Coronavirus Cases Per Day by 1 June," *Politics Home*, May 20, 2020, https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/pm-claims-uk-will-have-worldbeating-test-track-and-trace-system-up-and-running-by-1-june (accessed September 27, 2020).

111 *Joint Statement: Gender, Faith and COVID-19*, 1–5 at 1, available at https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/414015/2004-side-by-side_faith-gender-covid19-statement.pdf (accessed September 27, 2020).

112 *Joint Statement*, 4.

to Black Lives Matter protesters (who were teargassed and forcibly removed prior to his arrival),[113] the Church of England found its attempts at solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement marred by accusations of "utter hypocrisy" from within its own ranks.[114] Alwyn Pereira and Augustine Tanner-Ihm publicly recounted their multiple experiences of rejection for appointments based on racial stereotyping by Anglican bishops.[115] After the statue of slave trader Edward Colston was pulled down and rolled into the harbor waters in Bristol by Black Lives Matter demonstrators in the U.K., Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, proposed forgiving "the 'trespasses' of people immortalised in the form of statues, rather than tearing them down."[116]

4 Rising to the Challenge

Thus, despite acknowledging the problematic nature of Christian iconography that presents Jesus as White, Welby's response sounds like one that is more concerned with appeasing the erroneous belief that removing statues is erasing history, instead of recognizing that the history of slavery and continued racism have been monumentally erased by the prominence given to such statues in cities and cathedrals across the country. In the end, rather than wholeheartedly affirming that Black lives matter, and substantiating that affirmation with action to right past wrongs and root out systemic racism in the Church, Welby's approach comes across as a feeble 'all lives matter' plea that continues to ride roughshod over the experiences of Black Britons. This failure to engage in anti-racist action, like the failure to fully endorse the ordination of women, leaves the Church hierarchy unable to mount a sufficiently critical and convincing challenge to populist support for racist and misogynistic demagogues who

113 Mario Koran and Helen Sullivan, "Bishop 'Outraged' Over Trump's Church Photo Op During George Floyd Protests," *The Guardian*, June 2, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/02/outrageous-christian-leaders-reject-trump-use-of-church-as-prop-during-george-floyd-protests (accessed September 27, 2020).

114 Harriet Sherwood and Roz Scott, "C of E Accused of 'Utter Hypocrisy' Over Backing For Black Lives Matter," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/10/c-of-e-accused-of-utter-hypocrisy-over-backing-for-black-lives-matter (accessed September 27, 2020).

115 Sherwood and Scott, "C of E Accused of 'Utter Hypocrisy' Over Backing For Black Lives Matter."

116 Henry McDonald, "C of E Should Rethink Portrayal of Jesus as White, Welby Says," *The Guardian*, June 26, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/26/church-of-england-justin-welby-white-jesus-black-lives-matter (accessed September 27, 2020).

court Christian nationalism, such as Trump in America or Vladimir Putin in Russia.[117] The instrumentalization of religion by right-wing populists requires a much stronger defense; in addition, it is not enough to turn a blind eye to QAnon and hope that it will go away. Yet, an approach that seeks to separate 'real' Christians from those with whom one disagrees is fraught with ideological potholes.[118] If Christianity is a "living religion",[119] it encompasses all those who call themselves Christian; thus, seeking to monopolize 'Christianness' will be unlikely to change the minds of those swayed by the evangelical entanglement with right-wing populism and conspiracy theories. A viable critique of Christian racism, sexism, and right-wing politics, therefore, must be rooted in the attempt to improve the lives of the most vulnerable. Furthermore, if bishops in the U.K. are to use their privileged position in the House of Lords to advance equality and a preferential option for the poor, they need to be alert to inequalities of race and gender and to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to policies or appointments that ignore or implicitly endorse those inequalities. If church leaders are to be a force for change, they need to utilize their political power to call out prime ministerial braggadocio and to oppose the appointment of known misogynists, such as Tony Abbott,[120] to advisory roles. At the same time, they need to examine their own institutional and theological foundations and practices: there can be no gender or racial justice in Christianity without wholesale reformation.

117 Putin has appealed to Russian Orthodox Christianity by promoting traditional family values, reducing sentences for domestic violence within families and banning LGBT information. See Nancy LeTourneau, "How Putin Courted the Groups that Became Trump's Base," *Washington Monthly*, March 12, 2018, https://washingtonmonthly.com/2018/03/12/how-putin-courted-the-groups-that-became-trumps-base/ (accessed September 27, 2020).

118 See Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

119 See Esther McIntosh, "Living Religion: The Fluidity of Practice," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 79, no. 4 (2018), 383–396.

120 See "Transcript of Julia Gillard's Speech," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 10, 2012, https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/transcript-of-julia-gillards-speech-20121010-27c36.html (accessed September 27, 2020).

CHAPTER 13

The God of the Brexiteers

Lukas David Meyer

"Britain needs the Gospel of Christ, not the European Union. Our British nationhood is God-given over many centuries. It is not for politicians to do 'a deal' with. God determines a nation's security and prosperity. Britain needs to honor Him, not keep clinging to the European Union."[1] Based on this contraposition of Christianity and the European Union (EU), some Brexiteers protested for a No-Deal-Brexit near the House of the Commons in 2019. Although this radical position does not represent the leaders of the Anglican Church, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, there are political affiliations between Brexit and many members of the Church of England. Anglican church membership was a strong factor for voting 'leave,' independent of age and region.[2] Especially among *non-believing belongers*[3], the will to leave the European Union was stronger than in any other group of society: 69 percent voted to leave, merely 31 percent voted to remain. In fact, *believing belongers* were less EU-skeptical (55:45 percent in favor of Brexit); although this group of Anglican Church members was more strongly affiliated with Brexit than the rest of society. Recent investigations have shown how deep the split is within the British people in consequence of Brexit. Many voters expressed anti-elite sentiment not only against EU-leaders, but also towards the British government.[4] The split inside the Anglican Church is also noticeable: leaders and members differ in a remarkable way. Approximately two thirds of the Bishops of the Church of

1 Greg Evans, "Pro-Brexit Activists outside parliament are claiming God and the Bible are against the EU. Yes, really," *indy100 from Independent*, March 14, 2019, https://www.indy100.com/article/brexit-activists-god-bible-religion-leave-eu-no-deal-parliament-video-8822406 (accessed October 1, 2020).

2 There is a difference between distant church members (*belonging without believing*) and closer church members (*believing with belonging*). Distant members are defined as those who were baptized and live in an Anglican parish. Closer church members are defined as regular service attendees. See Greg Smith and Linda Woolhead, "Religion and Brexit: populism and the Church of England," *Religion, State and Society* 46, no. 3 (2018): 206–223, at 216.

3 For the contrast between believing and belonging see Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

4 Sara B. Hobolt, "The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent," *Journal of European Public Policy* 23, no. 9 (2016): 1259–1277.

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England voted to remain.[5] The Archbishop of Canterbury made a very careful yet notable case to remain in the European Union, for instance.[6]

How to explain this huge gap between bishops and members? What is populist about the referendum and who is the God of the Brexiteers? Which ecumenical lessons can be learnt from the referendum? To answer these questions, I start by giving a short definition of populism in order to explain what exactly is populist about Brexit. Using that definition, I analyze the theological arguments in favor of Brexit to identify the need for an ecumenical theology of Europe. As an ecumenically engaged theologian from Germany, I consider Brexit a problem and I want to provide theological insights and ideas to overcome nationalism in favor of transnational cooperation. However, although criticizing nationalist thought, I do not argue that we need a 'transnationalist' theology of Europe. My position is that we need an appropriate theological recognition of the European Union. On the one hand, we have to acknowledge the achievements of the European project. On the other hand, this acknowledgement should not lead to an uncritical stance with regards to the European Union. Therefore, I argue for a theology of Europe that relaunches the Conciliar Process with a closer reference to the European Union. Justice, peace, and the integrity of creation should remain the ethical focus of ecumenical efforts—not as empty promises, but as binding targets. A responsible commitment to the Conciliar Process requires a consequent self-engagement with the European Union.

1 What Is Populist about Brexit?

First, it is important to understand the history of populism and why populist forces—not only in the United Kingdom, but all over Europe—are able to undermine the traditional distinction between the political left and right. According to Hans Vorländer, there are two dimensions of populism: a 'vertical'

5 This estimate was stated at the conference "After Brexit: European Unity and the Unity of the European Churches", held on November 16, 2018, at Lambeth Palace, hosted by Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury. I attended the conference as part of a delegation from Germany, represented by Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Chair of the Council of Protestant Churches in Germany (EKD).

6 Harriet Sherwood, "Nigel Farage helping to legitimize racism, Justin Welby says," *Guardian*, June 7, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/07/nigel-farage-helping-to-legitimise-racism-justin-welby-says (accessed October 1, 2020).

one and a 'horizontal' one.[7] Particularly around the financial crisis of 2008, a vertical antagonism increased between the elite and the people. This first dimension states a division between 'us' and 'those high-up.' The 'horizontal' antagonism combines this anti-elite sentiment with anti-pluralism. Therefore, the second dimension that currently dominates populism all over Europe is mainly 'us' against 'them,' 'the strangers' and 'the migrants.' On many occasions, this anti-pluralist sentiment goes hand in hand with conspiracy theories suggesting that an elite of global high-ups wants to bring migrants into Europe.[8] Put plainly, a cosmopolitan elite is understood as a hidden power that is resettling migrants in order to infiltrate 'the people.' Consequently, populism is, as Jan-Werner Müller argues, "a moralized form of antipluralism" that incessantly speaks "in the name of the people as a whole."[9]

What is populist about Brexit? A very brief answer is that Brexit became a populist position when *hard Brexit* started to become the dominating idea among Brexiteers. Certainly, there are many ways to interpret a very unclear referendum, but a result of 52:48 percent definitely calls for respect for the high rate of Remainers and the organization of a *soft Brexit* as a compromise between two polarized blocks. However, hard Brexiteers see no need to find a compromise for a deeply divided society and therefore claim for themselves to speak 'in the name of the people as a whole.' Some soft Brexiteers might blame Theresa May for bad negotiations and defend their vote in 2016. However, the whole dynamic of Brexit has always been—at first latently and later openly—populist. There are populist elements in all the main arguments that Brexiteers repeated constantly.

I will focus on three main Brexit arguments here: first, 'stop migration!'; second, 'forget the economy!'; and third, 'sovereignty is the key!' Considering the first argument, it is clear that migration was the key issue in the referendum in 2016. Of course, some might argue it is not necessarily populist to support a more controlled migration regime—which is true. However, there has been a deeper anti-pluralist thought behind the migration argument. Foreigners were linked with the assertion of resettlement plans; the 'monster of Brussels' was conspiring against the sovereign will of the British people. Obviously, it was

7 See Hans Vorländer, *Migration und Populismus. Jahresbericht Mercator Forum Migration und Demokratie 2018* (Dresden: MIDEM, 2018), 15–16. See also Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 542–563.

8 For the relation between populism and conspiracism, see Thomas Lynch, "'Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you': Populism, Political Theology, and the Culturally Repugnant Other," in this volume.

9 Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 20.

a very effective and at the same time mendacious argument, because it overlooked all the sovereign decisions the United Kingdom had made on migration policy before—rarely with, very often against, the EU mainstream.[10] To start with, the United Kingdom chose not to sign the Schengen Agreement. The EU fully accepted that sovereign decision. With regard to the European refugee policy, the country accepted very few refugees given the size of its population and its economic strength. This caused challenges within the EU, because burdened countries such as Italy or Greece complained about special requests on refugee policy. Again, the EU showed more respect for sovereignty than for the need of a coherent refugee policy. In contrast, the immigration of mainly Polish people was equally a result of sovereign decisions of several British governments composed by various political forces. To sum up, the argument 'stop migration' effectively addressed fears coming up in the context of globalization. However, it did not contain the slightest reflection of the exceptional status the UK already had within the EU.

The second argument, 'forget the economy!', is more of a motive. There is a feeling of strength among Brexiteers reacting to bad economic developments since 2016 and worse predictions for the future. Using the definition of populism mentioned above, it is not a genuine populist argument, but traces of populism can nonetheless be identified here. There is an antagonism between the people and the elite, which gives more power to this argument. In addition, it was mainly this second argument that was attractive for many leftist Brexiteers, who blamed the EU for being a neo-liberal conspiracy that, once defeated, would be removed by a social and fair UK.

Whereas the first and second argument are related to the horizontal and vertical dimension of populism, the third argument, 'sovereignty is the key!', is a combination of both dimensions. Under the impression of current politics, we all notice how contradictory it is to claim the strengthening of the British Parliament by shutting it down, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson did. This is pure populism. Regrettably, such a way of understanding sovereignty never allowed for thinking about different levels of sovereignty, such as the regional, the national, and the European level, and for appreciating the EU principle of subsidiarity that has been fundamental to all crucial debates about the design of the EU. In addition, the inability to take Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish views into the Brexit debates is also indicative of the lack of recognition of

10 See Katherine E. Tonkiss, "Post-national citizenship without post-national identity? A case study of UK immigration policy and intra-EU migration," *Journal of Global Ethics* 9, no. 1 (2013): 35–48.

the multiple sovereignties which already exist within the UK.[11] Instead, sovereignty was mainly linked to English nationalism. Thus, it was simply considered a tool to get back the 'true' will of the people as a whole.

These three arguments explain the gulf between pro-remain bishops and pro-leave members. It is well known that the Remain campaign argued in a rather pragmatic way by focusing primarily on economic issues. This was its main mistake. Economic pragmatism is not able to tackle what Jürgen Habermas has called the "long shadow of nationalism,"[12] because Brexit is about identity. Here, theological arguments are of particular interest, because they have a long-lasting effect on identities, and are characterized by a close intersection between reason and emotion. The silence of many pro-European theologians was remarkable, because theologians are not normally known for not knowing what to say.

2 The God of the Brexiteers

Of course, pro-Brexit theologians were not silent. Especially among high church theologians, there was a strong sympathy to leave the European Union, as one can see by reading their entries in the Christian blogosphere. To analyze the 'God of the Brexiteers,' I will take a short look at the relation between the Anglican Church and the EU and then sum up different theological approaches to the three arguments I identified above.

In the early years after the Second World War, many church leaders, including George Bell, were in favor of European unification.[13] Different nations were understood as an expression of the richness of God's creation.[14] Nevertheless, Christian faith was considered the central authority that could reunite a continent lying in ruins. Church cooperation and European unification were initially supposed to go hand in hand.

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11 See Doug Gay, "Discipling Populism: A Theopolitical Alternative to Denial or Demonizing," in this volume.

12 Jürgen Habermas, *The Crisis of the European Union. A Response* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 7.

13 See Sander Luitwieler, "The EU. Protestant contributions, then and now," in *God and the EU: Retrieving the Christian Inspirations of the European Project*, ed. Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton (London: Routledge, 2015), 50–69.

14 See Justin Welby, *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). See also Lucian N. Leustean, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Making of the European Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

However, since the opening phase of European unification was dominated by Catholicism, Anglican disapproval grew.[15] Whereas the Catholic Church justified its pro-European course through the universal orientation of the Christian faith and with strong support of loyal Christian Democrats like Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi, and Robert Schumann, the Anglican Church was in search of a special path. Not so much Europe as the Commonwealth of Nations was supposed to guarantee the universal and non-national alignment, but local 'Englishness' and global 'Britishness' were the foundations for an identity outside Europe.

According to the Black liberation theologian Anthony Reddie, there is a deeper underpinning of a subterranean theology of election, which identifies Whiteness and Englishness, as it became known in the toxic rhetoric around the Brexit referendum.[16] God's abiding election of White and English people is therefore a theological trope that supports the anti-migration argument.[17] The romanticized exaggeration of the Victorian era led to a melancholia about the loss of the British Empire, but also to a nationalist over-estimation and unfitness to admit British colonial guilt.[18] When applying Reddie's analysis to the three main arguments, one can easily identify ethno-religious relics in the Brexit debate.

A more academic, subtler version of the theological views that Reddie criticizes has been voiced by Nigel Biggar. Even though Biggar claimed to have voted to remain for economic reasons, he argued in favor of leaving the EU many times.[19] Biggar stressed the importance of a cultural dominance over other sub-cultures.[20] Therefore, a fine-meshed border security and restriction of migration are important tools to guarantee this cultural dominance.[21] In addition, he regards Anglican state-church privileges as an element of

15 Confessional cultures still have a noticeable effect on the EU approval rates in the member states. See Brent F. Nelsen and James L. Guth, *Religion and the Struggle for European Union: Confessional Culture and the Limits of Integration* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 322–323.

16 See Anthony G. Reddie, *Theologising Brexit: A Liberationist and Postcolonial Critique* (London: Routledge, 2019), 1.

17 Reddie, *Theologising Brexit*, 185.

18 Reddie, *Theologising Brexit*, 27.

19 See Nigel Biggar, "What's Hounding Baskerville?", *Providence Mag*, August 17, 2016, https://providencemag.com/2016/08/whats-hounding-baskerville-brexit-theresa-may/ (accessed October 1, 2020).

20 Nigel Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis: An Ethic of the Nation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014): 25, 97.

21 Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis*, 51–52.

national culture.[22] Biggar was mainly interested in presenting the nation as a moral good that needs to be defended to "preserve the cultural consensus necessary to keep its customs and institutions intelligible and morally authoritative."[23] Remarkably, Biggar did not express any serious worries about the economic consequences of Brexit, but stressed the greater sovereignty he was excited about.[24] Even though he admitted that sin can infect institutions, he seemed not to consider the possibility that Brexit could be an example of such an infection.[25]

By comparing Reddie's and Biggar's positions, one can easily see that mainly the migration argument, but also the economy and the sovereignty argument, were represented by Christians. Essentially, the idea of God's election of English (sometimes British) people looks like a central Brexit driver in the debate.

However, Giles Fraser, an Anglican priest well-known for his interventions in public and political debates, made a Christian case for Brexit that argued without reference to migration and election. He criticized the EU's neo-liberal character to make his case for a stronger re-integration of the UK into the Commonwealth.[26] Fraser levelled the danger of an economic collapse by stressing that at least everybody would be as poor as the people in his parish are.[27] He praised the 'creative destruction' a hard Brexit could cause, thus forcing politicians and public to fix a broken society.[28] This is, to put it mildly, a strange argument, as all economic analysts stated that Brexit would harm poor people the most.[29] Of course, Fraser is not an economist. Arguably, he considers himself a prophet who criticizes injustice. In contrast to the 'evil' EU spirit, a more sovereign United Kingdom would make it possible to shape

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22 Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis*, 35–43.

23 Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis*, 51–52. The project 'Ethics and Empire,' led by Biggar, arguably offers a similar approach to this defense of the nation. See https://www.mcdonaldcentre.org.uk/ethics-and-empire (accessed October 1, 2020).

24 See Nigel Biggar, "What's Hounding Baskerville?"

25 Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis*, 38.

26 See, among plenty of other contributions, Giles Fraser, "EU referendum: remain or leave? Rev Giles Fraser has his say," *Christian Aid*, June 14, 2016, https://medium.com/christian-aid-eu-referendum/eu-referendum-remain-or-leave-rev-giles-fraser-has-his-say-1312ecc54623 (accessed October 1, 2020).

27 Giles Fraser, "Still puzzled by the Brexit vote? Take yourself off to Blakenall Heath," *Guardian*, October 12, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2017/oct/12/still-puzzled-by-the-brexit-vote-take-yourself-off-to-blakenall-heath (accessed October 1, 2020).

28 Giles Fraser, "Could Brexit fix our broken politics?," *Unheard*, January 18, 2019, https://unherd.com/2019/01/could-brexit-fix-our-broken-politics/ (accessed October 1, 2020).

29 Inge de Vreede, "Measuring the Permanent Costs of Brexit," *National Institute Economic Review* 244, no. 1 (2018): 46–55.

globalization in a just way. The fact that there are EU member states with very strong social security systems, such as Sweden, Denmark, and also Germany, was not a topic for Fraser's interventions. This is interesting in itself, because it shows the argumentative structure: the sinners are 'the others over there in Brussels,' but a redesigned nation can save the poor.

Overall, many Christian ideas were linked to the Brexit arguments outlined above. They gave religious power to these arguments, thus strengthening the sense of belonging, which was crucial for the vast majority of Anglican Brexit voters. 'The God of the Brexiteers,' then, is a God who has elected the British people first. This election will either protect them from economic danger or help them to do penance for injustice. As a result, there will be a great restitution of the British nation that will rule again. Christian Remainers, however, followed the pragmatic, economy-oriented campaign in a regrettable way.[30] There was no notable ecumenical Remain-position that linked European achievements such as pacification, rule of law, environmental protection, and prosperity with the Christian concepts of justice, reconciliation, peace, and the integrity of creation.

3 Towards a Theology of Europe

To tackle such theologically-infused populism, a critical analysis of theologies of nationalism is not enough. We need a theology of Europe. Brexit should remind Christians of their potential to overcome nationalism by fostering global unity.[31] The three principles of the Conciliar Process—'justice, peace, and the integrity of creation'—are useful theological tools to launch renewed Christian support for European integration. The main assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) initiated the Conciliar Process in Vancouver 1983

30 For a detailed discussion, see the contributions to *The Future of Brexit Britain: Anglican Reflections on National Identity and European Solidarity*, ed. Jonathan Chaplin and Andrew Bradstock (London: SPCK, 2020).

31 By criticizing such nationalism, I am referring mainly to English nationalism. Scottish nationalism is a special case that has increased during Brexit since its main driver, the Scottish National Party (SNP), combines the quest for independence with a pro-European agenda. For a detailed discussion, see again Gay, "Discipling Populism," in this volume. I am skeptical about the 'discipled' nationalism that Gay advocates. Such an ideal-typical tolerant nationalism may work in theory, but empirically grounded enquiries demonstrate that exclusion tends to come with any construction of nationalism. See the contributions to *Nation, Nationalität, Nationalismus*, ed. by Christian Jansen and Hendrik Borggräfe (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007). This is by no means an argument against Scottish independence, but a call to caution when it comes to nationalism.

with the purpose to unite Christian churches in seeking peace in view of global division, inequalities, and climate change.[32] In my reading, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation could be taken as criteria to check EU policy. This implies a global perspective that values the European integration as a contribution to global challenges. However, all criteria need to be implemented on a local scale, which stresses the importance to balance sovereignty and subsidiarity on a European, national and regional level. When referring to these criteria, justice needs to be interpreted as both social and legal justice, the achievements of peace in the EU are to be acknowledged, and the need of a European climate diplomacy must be expressed with the motivational potential of theology.

In 2019, Welby made a first step at the general assembly of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in Novi Sad, Serbia, where he called the EU "the greatest dream realized for human beings since the fall of the Western Roman Empire. It brought peace, prosperity, compassion for the poor and weak, purpose for the aspirational, and hope for all its people."[33] However, this statement was too little, too late, and voiced too far away from the debate. There are two reasons why the CEC was not able to communicate a pro-European theology around the referendum. First, the church functionaries involved tend to be willing to *sit* at the table, but do not know what to *say* at the table. When considering the political impact on EU politics, their main achievement was their lobbying for a stronger position within the European religious legislation. However, CEC still struggles to define its proper contribution to concrete political issues.[34] Second, and more importantly, the network has been mainly a moderator between West and East during the Cold War. In order to keep up its mediating function, the CEC has kept a distance from the process of European unification. This has not changed until today, which explains the somewhat helpless role the network played during Brexit. Even a very pro-European statement, such as the "Charta Oecumenica. Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe,"[35] did not help to develop a theological

32 See Daniel P. Niles, *Between the Flood and the Rainbow. Interpreting the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment* (*covenant*) *to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992).

33 Justin Welby, "Christian Presence and Witness in Europe. An address to the Assembly of the Conference of European Churches," https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GEN_19_Justin-Welby_EN.pdf (accessed October 1, 2020).

34 See Patrick Roger Schnabel, "Der 'Öffentlichkeitsauftrag der Kirche' und die Europäische Integration," *Praktische Theologie* 49, no. 2 (2014): 99–106.

35 Conference of European Churches, "Charta Oecumenica. Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe," https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ChartaOecumenica.pdf (accessed October 1, 2020).

argument for Europe. The statement itself is very clear and formulates honest intentions. All churches claim to participate in the EU: "On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail."[36] The churches also commit themselves "to counteract any form of nationalism which leads to the oppression of other peoples and national minorities and to engage ourselves for non-violent resolutions."[37] To put these intentions into practice, however, both a theological reflection and a practical reorientation would be needed.

A promising approach might be to revive the Conciliar Process. Welby was right when he said that the European Union was "the greatest dream" for human beings in this area of the world. We are experiencing the longest period of peace. The European unification helped many states to develop the rule of law, including the protection of minorities. Nowadays the close cooperation within the EU could be an effective instrument to manage globalization and climate change. Therefore, it is the right goal to go on reconciling former enemies and transform them into good neighbors, to support the weakest and the poorest, and to protect the integrity of creation.

However, a theology of Europe should not repeat the mistakes that nationalist theologies made when they sacralized the nation. When tackling the EU as a theological topic, it is crucial to maintain a critical distance. This is why I am not arguing for a 'theology of the European Union.' Openness to other European countries that are not members of the European Union is as important as openness to the global implications of EU politics. Recognizing the achievements of the European project must not mean forgetting European colonialism. However, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation tend to remain bloomy—on closer inspection, empty—phrases, if there is no connection to political institutions that guarantee self-binding and reliable action on behalf of these principles. Churches should commit themselves in a responsible way to EU politics.

The European Union is no holy nation. However, it is the political sphere in which European churches can commit themselves to contributing to the Conciliar Process. The populist politics of Brexit has demonstrated how dangerous a theological myopia can be. A theology of Europe might allow us to rethink what a responsible re-launch of the Conciliar Process could and should look like.

36 Conference of European Churches, "Charta Oecumenica."

37 Conference of European Churches, "Charta Oecumenica."

CHAPTER 14

Discipling Populism: A Theopolitical Alternative to Denial or Demonizing

Doug Gay

Populism and nationalism are topics regularly mentioned in the same breath. They are often seen as inextricably linked and, singularly or jointly, held to be sinister and toxic phenomena which are intrinsically unethical. Such verdicts are common both at a popular journalistic level and in academic literature within political theology, theological ethics, and political theory. In this chapter I draw on arguments from my own previous work on the ethics of nationalism[1] to consider how far they can also be applied to populism. After investigating the vexed question of definitions, I explore the idea that there are certain tests which can be applied to determine whether a particular form of populism or nationalism is ethically (un)acceptable. As a practical and political theologian, I am interested in the performative elements of political positions and stances: how we live them out, take them up as places in which to stand. The chapter concludes by drawing on the language of discipleship and the idea of 'discipling populism' to connect the language of theopolitical ethics to everyday Christian practice.

1 Definitions

While I sympathize with the view that too much emphasis on definitions can seem like interminable academic 'throat-clearing,' sometimes we have no choice. We simply have to pause to consider how we and others are using key terms if we are going to deal fairly and intelligibly with one another.

One of the key challenges I addressed in *Honey From the Lion* was that of definitions of nationalism which come preloaded with an ethical deficit, assuming that nationalism is intrinsically unethical. One prominent example

1 Doug Gay, *Honey From The Lion - Christianity and the Ethics of Nationalism* (London: SCM, 2013).

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of this comes (unhelpfully) from Stephen Grosby's *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction.*[2] Grosby writes,

> When one divides the world into two irreconcilable and warring camps—one's own nation in opposition to all other nations—where the latter are viewed as one's own implacable enemies, then in contrast to patriotism, there is the ideology of nationalism. Nationalism repudiates civility and the differences that it tolerates by attempting to eliminate all differing views and interests for the sake of one vision of what the nation has been and should be.[3]

Grosby's definition of nationalism comes with an ethical deficit baked in from the outset. The implication is that all nationalisms are pathological and 'uncivilized' with what verges on a neo-fascist bent to a nationalist's view of the nation. His definition is particularly unfortunate because it occurs in a widely read undergraduate introduction, which should be opening up and enabling critical conversation as opposed to crudely foreclosing it.

As well as criticizing definitions which build in an ethical deficit, I want to also reject the opposite error of building in an ethical profit. The most recent academic example of this can be found in Yoram Hazony's *The Virtue of Nationalism*, which argues that to be a nationalist is a virtue.[4] Hazony constructs his analysis around an overly simplistic contrast between nationalism and his own, distinctively defined understanding of 'imperialism.' Definitions and how they are operationalized are crucial throughout Hazony's work because they determine whether specific examples do or don't qualify as instances of virtuous nationalism. His understanding of self-determination for example does not extend to Palestinian rights. In fact, his understanding of 'virtuous' nationalism invariably *breaks* towards the interests of the state of Israel to an extent that verges on embarrassing.[5]

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2 Stephen Grosby, *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

3 Grosby, *Nationalism*, 17.

4 Yoram Hazony, *The Virture of Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 12: "In my father's house I was taught that to be a nationalist is a virtue."

5 See Yoram Hazony, "Why we need the Jewish State law," *The Times of Israel*, November 23, 2014, https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/israels-jewish-state-law-and-the-future-of-the-middle-east/ (accessed September 9, 2020).

In my own work, I have taken a lead from the work of Edinburgh University sociologist Jonathan Hearn, in particular his 2006 study *Rethinking Nationalism*, which deserves to be more widely known.[6] Hearn's work is particularly important because he offers a methodological route out of a conversation stopping impasse created by those like Grosby or Hazony who insist on preloading vice or virtue into their definitions.

Like most theorists of nationalism in the past thirty years, Hearn is wary of attempting a definition and recognizes that no single definition seems possible. However, the one he finally proposes and which I adopt, is to see nationalism as a series of claims on behalf of a population, to identity, jurisdiction, and territory. As a practical theologian, I am drawn to the idea of nationalism as a practice of claim making. In terms of political theory this definition addresses key variables, but without assuming either ethical credit or deficit. The way this cashes out is that if you as a nationalist are making a series of claims, I can attend to them and try to assess whether they are legitimate or illegitimate, justifiable or unjustifiable. Hearn's definition in no way inhibits me from denouncing your nationalism as racist, xenophobic, and self-serving. But what seems important (and I would suggest is non-coincidentally related to its provenance in Scotland) is that as a definition, it does allow me to engage with the nationalism of the Scottish National Party for example and recognize that it claims to be predicated on a very different set of progressive and liberal values.[7]

Hearn's argument in *Rethinking Nationalism* seems to me to be a welcome improvement on more extreme options to the left and right of his position, but in my experience most theologians and ethicists stop short of moving to his more dynamic and 'neutral' definition, more often because they arrive in the conversation wanting to bury nationalism than to follow Hazony in praising it. One thing I do agree with Hazony on is that you gain nothing at all in ethical or theological terms by opting to speak of 'patriotism' rather than nationalism. This, which is Grosby's tactic in the quote above, is a surprisingly common move among political theologians, adopted by Luke Bretherton and

6 Jonathan Hearn, *Rethinking Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Hearn's work, significantly produced in a Scottish context although he is from the USA, stands alongside that of David McCrone, particularly his study *The Sociology of Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), in making a distinctively non-pathologizing contribution to contemporary theories of nationalism.

7 See Gay, *Honey from the Lion*, 92–102, for details of the SNP's rise to power in Scotland and the tradition within the left-wing of Scottish nationalism since the 1920s of blending nationalism and internationalism.

Nigel Biggar among others. [8] In his 2010 *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, Bretherton asserts that nationalism is a false and destructive form of 'binding and loosing.' In a 2020 article on "The Nature of Democratic Citizenship," while he is still denouncing nationalism as "sectarian and exclusionary," he is offering qualified approval to "constitutional patriotism" which is loyal to a liberal constitutional order.[9] His argument becomes tortuous and unconvincing, however, when he tries to assert that his "consociational constitutional patriotism" offers a virtuous contrast to liberal internationalism which is inescapably Eurocentric and blind to the realities of colonialism.[10] The logic here depends on generalizing about internationalism as irredeemably naïve in relation to the inequities of the international order in a way which does huge disservice to radical strains of internationalism exemplified in a Scottish context by iconic figures like Hamish Henderson or Hugh MacDiarmid, which have decisively shaped the culture and norms of mainstream political nationalism in Scotland. His continued sweeping rejection of nationalism as sectarian and exclusionary refuses to take account of examples of anti-imperialist nationalisms present in decolonizing struggles both in Africa and Central and Eastern Europe and of radical-liberal nationalisms which define themselves dialectically in relation to internationalism and are avowedly anti-racist and anti-colonial. My experience therefore remains one of finding it hard to open space for a fresh and critical conversation about nationalism with theologians who insist in this way on their own ethical pre-loading of the term.

This is not unrelated to another common difficulty encountered in attempting to talk about nationalism: the phenomenon identified by Michael Billlig of banal nationalism. In crude terms this boils down to other people's nationalisms, like other people's children or pets perhaps, always being more annoying than your own. This annoyance is rooted in the perception that other people's 'strident' claims to identity, jurisdiction, and territory make *them* nationalists as opposed to our more civilized patriotism or more serene cosmopolitanism, which rests on a territorial, juridical, and identitarian status quo which we

8 Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 132–134; Luke Bretherton, "Political Theology, Religious Diversity and the Nature of Democratic Citizenship," *Political Theology* 21, no. 4 (2020), 318–338, at 326; Nigel Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis: An Ethic of the Nation* (London: James Clarke & Co, 2014). See also Doug Gay, "Patriotism Good, Nationalism Bad? The News from Scotland," *Modern Believing* 53, no. 4 (2012): 419–425.

9 Bretherton, "Political Theology, Religious Diversity and the Nature of Democratic Citizenship," 327.

10 Bretherton, "Political Theology, Religious Diversity and the Nature of Democratic Citizenship," 327.

assume or presume to be legitimate because of its 'banal' familiarity. For both a classic and a telling example of this down through the centuries, which is near to hand, UK scholars need only think of British attitudes to Ireland.[11]

2 An Ethics of Nationalism

To bring the academic conversation right into the realities of our own lived experience, a key part of my argument in *Honey From the Lion* was that all of us in possession of passports, particularly those which offer powerful privileges of access and mobility, needed to heed Billig and fess up to our own (banal) nationalisms. I argued there that the capacity of theological ethics and political theology to read nationalism had been distorted for too long by frames drawn from the Second World War. We need to move on to consider the experience of national liberation struggles in the process of decolonization and of the remapping of Europe in the wake of 1989. These expressions of nationalism in express opposition to imperialism, colonialism, and totalitarianism should move us to reconsider what nationalism is capable of being and doing.

Building on Hearn's talk of making 'claims,' the task I tried to join was to construct an ethics of nationalism. I leant on Augustine and his common objects of love as a call to assess the claims of both aspirant and regnant nationalisms.[12] I proposed a theological vision in which the particularistic claims of any nationalism were always 'trumped' (I now wish I had not used that word!) for Christian theology and spirituality by universal doctrines of creation and redemption. I proposed that all nationalisms needed to make three key 'baptismal' renunciations if Christians were to be able to offer ethical justifications for supporting them.[13]

First, and corresponding to 'the world,' they need to renounce imperialism, by which I mean the aspiration to dominate, invade or assert superiority over other nations. Positively they need to embrace the practice of equal regard and *recognition*, to give ethical force to the common term for acknowledging state credentials.

Second, I relate 'the flesh' to the renunciation of essentialism, rejecting any form of *ius sanguinis* in favor of *ius soli*. In Scotland, the writer William

11 For a fine illustration of and commentary on this, see Irish writer Fintan O'Toole's brilliant analysis of Brexit: *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain* (London: Apollo, 2018).

12 Gay, *Honey From the Lion*, 70–83.

13 Echoing the traditional renunciations of 'the world, flesh, and devil' in the baptismal liturgy.

McIlvanney made a famous speech in which he celebrated Scotland as a "mongrel nation."[14] The same point was famously made by Desmond Tutu's vision of South Africa as a "rainbow nation."[15] The point is to reject any aspiration to ethnic purity or singularity in favor of 'fuzzy nationalism,' hybridity, and hyphenated identity. An ethically defensible vision of national identity has to be built around porous forms of national belonging and citizenship accessible through 'naturalization.' Christians can only ever be justified in supporting forms of nationalism which are actively and resolutely anti-racist. This is at the heart of the claim that there can be such a thing as civic or liberal nationalism. It is decisively informed by the catholicity of the church as an emergent international nation.

Finally, I use the figure of 'renouncing the devil' to argue for the rejection of absolutism. In theopolitical terms this requires advocating a post-Barmen nationalism in which national sovereignty always and only exists under divine sovereignty and under Christ's Lordship.[16] This requires a decisive rejection of the nation as an idol and an insistence that no Christian could ever be justified in saying 'my country right or wrong.'

The link to those baptismal renunciations classically associated with discipleship, catechesis, and holy living reinforces my concern to root this 'political' discussion in a form of practical-ecclesial theological ethics which can 'preach' and can frame catechesis. My claim was and is that nationalisms need to be 'discipled,' that is, they need to be aimed at and adjusted towards faithful Christian living in the world on an ongoing basis. This requires both intentions to renounce and embrace, but also accountability and ongoing metanoia as national identity is performed in particular places and times. I proposed a provisional set of theopolitical criteria for judging nations and nationalism and for assessing the behavior of Christians:

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14 see Antonia Kearton's discussion of this incident in "Imagining the 'Mongrel Nation': Political Uses of History in the Recent Scottish Nationalist Movement," *National Identities* 7, no. 1 (2005), 23–50.

15 For background to Tutu's phrase and its contemporary appropriations see Wonke Buqa, "Storying Ubuntu as a rainbow nation," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 2 (2015), https://verbumetecclesia.org.za/index.php/VE/article/view/1434 (accessed November 30, 2020).

16 My use of the phrase post-Barmen nationalism in *Honey From the Lion* and here is an attempt to engage with a theological debate about the ethics of nationalism which I feel has become 'stuck' on the idea that the Barmen critique of Nazism rules out all and any forms of nationalism as options for those who make the Barmen confession of Christ as Lord to resist an idolatrous conception of the nation. My argument is that it is possible to be a Barmen confessing nationalist, but that this will decisively shape the claims made by the nationalism one espouses.

> Do they accept universal narratives of human equality and diversity?
> Are they willing to make the key renunciations?
> Do their national projects enable 'better objects of love'?
> Internally do they enable a politics of the common good for all citizens and residents?
> Do they enable external relations of peace and security?
> Would pursuit of their goals lead to negative outcomes for their neighbors?
> Is pursuit of their national goals compatible with positive goals for the international community: JPIC (justice, peace and the integrity of creation)?[17]

Finally, I suggested that while we would often be defending some version of the Goldilocks principle (for many British Unionists this has been that the EU was too big, Scotland was too small, but the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was just right) we needed to be open to a more fluid and dynamic understanding of polity-making, which could imagine responding to different historical contexts by either entering a political union or by leaving it, by asserting independence or by sharing and pooling sovereignty.

My key claim for nationalism, therefore, is that it has more ethical capacity and potential than is assumed by those who operate deficit definitions. Nationalisms should be assessed not just by the claims they make or the intentions they espouse, but according to how they are performed, incarnated, and instantiated in particular contexts. Nationalisms have to be discipled and disciplined. Fintan O'Toole insists that all mature nations need to develop a culture of honest self-criticism and cites the example of William Butler Yeats defending Sean O'Casey's play *The Plough and the Stars* against accusations of betrayal from radical republicans.[18] As well as being post-Barmen, Christian assessments of nationalism also need to be post-Belhar.

3 Populism

The 2016 Brexit vote displayed how a refusal to own and acknowledge English nationalism by the left and by English public theology had left it for too long

17 On justice, peace and the integrity of creation, see Lukas David Meyer, "The God of the Brexiteers," in this volume. I am sympathetic to Meyer's general argument, although I think his use of the terms 'nationalism' and 'transnational' needs clarification for the reasons I outline in this chapter.

18 I heard him give this example in a talk at Glasgow School of Art in April 2014.

the undiscipled, undisciplined creature of the far right.[19] In Scotland, by contrast, nationalism has since the 1920s been in constant dialogue primarily with the left, but to a degree with the churches. This dialogue has discipled it to being for the most part a pluralistic, anti-racist, peaceable, civic, and liberal discourse; one which is allied to social democracy and capable of being appropriated by the radical left and the Greens as a discourse of radical self-determination. Crucially, the mainstream of Scottish nationalism has for a century been self-consciously both nationalist and internationalist in its orientation, setting claims for self-determination in the context of other-recognition.

While my work and reading have been more in nationalism studies than in populism studies, I suggest that many of the same issues I have encountered and raised with nationalism are also present in relation to populism. In Peter Baker's January 2019 'Long Read,' a longform essay for the *Guardian*, he deftly summarizes current debates about the difficulty of defining populism.[20] In particular he offers a thoughtful examination of the relationship between the thin-ideology position set out in Cas Mudde's "The Populist Zeitgeist" and the more critical defense of the possibilities of populism offered in the work of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau:[21]

> Mouffe, in particular, has in recent years argued that the political question of the immediate future is not how to fight populism, but rather which type of populist you want to be. It is about who you are with (who belongs in your "chain of equivalence"), who you are against (who is causing the problem, and how), and where to take your stand. Populism is not the problem: instead, leftwing populism is the solution.

Baker adds:

> Not all the academics who take inspiration from Mouffe and Laclau go quite this far, especially in the sober pages of peer-reviewed political sci-

19 Meyer, "The God of the Brexiteers," discusses these issues. Ecclesially, however, he focuses only on the Church of England. Taking Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland into account would have allowed him to explore the internal dynamics of Brexit in relation to the four nations of the UK.

20 Peter C. Baker, "'We the people': the battle to define populism," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/jan/10/we-the-people-the-battle-to-define-populism (accessed September 9, 2020).

21 Baker, "'We the people.'" See also Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–563 and Chantal Mouffe, *For A Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018).

> ence journals. But their work is palpably motivated by a sense that the real threat of "populism" is that our panic over the word will foreclose the possibility of new kinds of politics and new challenges to the status quo—and that fear of populism on the left could enable the victory of populism of the right. … These scholars' preference is for definitions in which it has no ideological essence—not even the "thin" one posited by … Mudde.[22]

Baker goes on to cite Paris Aslanidis and Benjamin Moffit as offering examples of the kind of move I have argued Hearn has made in relation to nationalism.[23] To paraphrase Alister MacIntyre, my argument would be that for political theology and theological ethics, our questions should be 'Whose nationalism? What populism?'

One of the possible responses to the latter question has been the term "inclusive/inclusionary populism" which was developed in an article by Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser[24] and has more recently been used by London based Anglo-Catholic activist priest Angus Ritchie as the title of a 2019 book on promoting civic activism for social justice.[25] Mudde and Kaltwasser argue that amid a welter of competing definitions of populism, their preferred 'thin-ideology' is best suited to accommodate the 'chameleonic' character of populism, which "can be left-wing or right-wing, organized in top-down or bottom-up fashion, rely on strong leaders or be even leaderless."[26] They draw attention to the normative factors in any definition of populism[27] and the crucial moral distinctions drawn between the status of 'the people' and 'the elite' across all forms of populism.[28] In their thin ideology definition, there are only three constant terms in any populism, whether of the left or the right: a pure people, a corrupt elite, and a general Rousseau-esque will of the people. I will return to those first two terms, but I am in strong agreement with their view that we should abandon attempts to nail down a single strong or thick definition of populism in the singular and focus on analysis of a variety

22 Baker, "'We the people.'"

23 Baker, "'We the people.'"

24 Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America," *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 2 (2013): 147–174.

25 Angus Ritchie, *Inclusive Populism: Creating Citizens in the Global Age* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

26 Mudde and Kaltwasser, "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism," 153.

27 Mudde and Kaltwasser, "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism," 150.

28 Mudde and Kaltwasser, "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism," 151.

of sub-types. The article offers a regional comparison between European and Latin American populisms, the authors arguing (uncontroversially) that the former tend to be exclusionary right-wing movements and the latter radical inclusionary movements. This approach aligns with my argument that we need to talk about 'nationalisms' in the plural and their approach to studying populism has a good deal in common with Hearn's approach to nationalism. Hearn too responds to what Mudde and Kaltwasser term a 'dissensus' by rowing back from a maximal, ethically loaded definition of nationalism and proposing a thinner alternative which can be performed and instantiated in a variety of forms. In fact, his language about 'claims' could usefully be adapted to the task of defining populism. Mudde and Kaltwasser based their account of the normative dimension on Dani Filc's 2010 study of the political right in Israel in which he had distinguished between "three dimensions of exclusion/inclusion: material, political and symbolic."[29] I am not wholly convinced about their language of 'purity' and 'corruption' and would prefer, while retaining their thin approach, to develop processes of definition inflected by the work of Hearn and Anderson from within nationalism studies.[30] If this were combined with Filc, we could move towards characterizing and distinguishing populisms in terms of *the claims made about the political motivation and will of imagined peoples and elites, and their just entitlements to identity, wealth, and power.* We might also want to draw on Anglo-Irish political theologian Oliver O'Donovan who claims, rightly I believe, that "to see ourselves as a people is a work of moral imagination."[31] This powerfully combines Benedict Anderson's celebrated analytical insight that the constitution of any 'people' is the product of an act of imagination with a reminder that the work of imagining is a moral (and/or immoral) task.[32] Mudde and Kaltwasser note, in their comparison of Europe and Latin America, that in relatively wealthy Europe, right-wing exclusionary movements seek to narrow their definition of who is part of the people and what they are entitled to, while in poorer Latin American countries, inclusionary movements draw marginalized groups into a reimagined and expanded definition of the people and its entitlements.[33]

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29 Mudde and Kaltwasser, "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism," 158–159, citing Dani Filc, *The Political Right In Israel: Different Faces of Jewish Populism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 128–138.

30 Hearn, Rethinking Nationalism; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

31 Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 151.

32 Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*

33 Mudde and Kaltwasser, "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism," 160.

O'Donovan's ethical-theological twist to Anderson's emphasis on imagination also offers a point from which to bridge back into the language of discipleship. As someone formed by evangelicalism in my youth, I have been horrified by the extent of support for Donald Trump among white evangelicals in the USA. As someone based within a mainstream UK denomination I have been dismayed at the weakness of mainstream denominations, particularly in England, in responding to the issues raised by the Brexit referendum.[34] I believe these two examples raise deep questions about the formation of citizens within the USA and the UK and as a practical and ecclesial theologian, I am exercised about the responsibility of the Christian churches in contributing to such formation. Stanley Hauerwas famously claimed that Baptism and the Supper were "the rituals of our politics."[35] The political formation of Christian people depends deeply on these rituals but it also depends on their being embedded in a broader process of catechesis, of education and formation, of being discipled into the way of Jesus Christ. It is not said often enough or clearly enough, that as Christians we need to learn how to be Scottish or Spanish, Swedish or Somali. When I say 'learn' I mean the kind of life-long learning, whole-life learning which makes O'Donovan's work of moral imagination a lifetime's work done in critical conversation and interaction with others. Christians need to be discipled into the ethics of saying 'we the people'[36] in the light of our key rituals and to be challenged about our practices of exclusion and inclusion in the light of our sacred scriptures, with their insistent focus on loving both neighbors and enemies and restless probing of the question as to who is our neighbor. Our collective imaginings about being a people need to be disciplined by the moral imaginaries of Genesis and Revelation, with their respective portrayals of creational unity and eschatological diversity. From the earliest years of Sunday School, we need a narrative catechesis which emphasizes that we, along with people of every nation, are in Hamish Henderson's terms 'bairns o' Adam' or in C. S. Lewis's words 'daughters of Eve' and that the heaven we hope for is to be imagined in Tutu's rainbow perspective as setting us among people 'from every tribe and tongue and nation.'[37]

Additionally, the discipling of both nationalism and populism requires their performance to answer to those most basic and ordinary concerns of Christian

34 See Anthony Reddie's excoriating treatment in *Theologizing Brexit: A Liberationist and Postcolonial Critique* (London: Routledge, 2019).

35 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 99.

36 See Gay, *Honey from the Lion*, 6–8, on making claims to identity.

37 See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Grounding the Rights We Have as Human Persons," in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012), 201–226.

ethics: that we should tell the truth, that we should not say that we do not need each other, particularly not those who are 'weaker,' that we should discern the presence of Christ in the least of his sisters and brothers, that we should keep in step with the Spirit and bear the fruits of the Spirit, that we should do to others as we would they did unto us. If this sounds simplistic or naïve or pious, I see that risk as worth taking in order as a practical theologian to emphasize two things. The first is that the work of moral imagination involved in becoming English or American, Syrian or Serbian is a crucial and neglected aspect of ordinary Christian formation. The second is that in the light of our everyday experience of racist and fascist forms of populism, such moral imagination has to work not only at the level of academic discourse, but has to take *popular* forms and be deeply integrated into song, liturgy, and iconography in worship; into the curricula of Sunday Schools, Alpha Courses, home groups in Christian education, and into the day to day discourse of parenting in the home. We need an ongoing decolonization of our understanding of discipleship and a decentering of ethnic and cultural privilege which reaches down into the detail of these everyday practices and works to reimagine them.

4 Towards More Open Definitions

In conclusion, while some terms—fascism, racism, imperialism, colonialism—are not properly or adequately defined for Christian theology unless they come preloaded with a presumption of sin and a summons to repentance, I have argued here that nationalism and populism are not the same kind of thing. We can and should be prepared to work with 'thinner' and more open definitions, which allow for sharp, critical, and contextual readings of the phenomena we are describing at any given time. That way, we will be better able to fulfil the concerns of this volume, which is to have a rich, demanding, and illuminating conversation about how to understand the storms which are raging around us and how to navigate our way through them.

In Scotland, that means reflecting on how a still remarkably popular nationalist government has resisted a wave of xenophobia, neoliberal deception, and Anglo-British nostalgia; a populist Brexit wave borne along by shameless modes of rhetoric which have exhibited a cynical disregard for truth in public life and discourse. The SNP has responded in keeping with its long-held aspiration for independence within Europe, offering a hybrid rhetoric which is both nationalist and internationalist, committed to both independence and interdependence.

I want at this point to be very clear what I am and am not asserting. I am not asserting that people in Scotland are intrinsically 'less racist' or xenophobic

than people anywhere else in the UK or the world. As a Reformed Christian with due appreciation of my Pauline, Augustinian, and Calvinist roots, I have a sober appreciation of the capacity of all human societies for evil. I advocate for a penitent attitude towards Scottish history, which includes a journey of deepening awareness and repentance in respect of Scotland's complicity in colonialism and empire. I am profoundly realistic about the very significant ongoing challenges Scottish society faces in challenging racism and decentering white privilege.

What I am asserting is that in terms of the civic and political leadership given by Scottish governments since 1999, this has been consistently liberal, progressive, and aimed at repudiating and combatting racism. The major 'banner' under which this has been developed is the 'One Scotland, Many Cultures' initiative which dates from 2002, that is before the SNP were in power. Although it was developed by a Unionist coalition of Labour and the Scottish Liberal Democrats, it was fully affirmed and supported by the SNP at the time, and it was consolidated and developed by them since coming to power at Holyrood in 2007.[38] Bashir Ahmad, the first non-white and first Muslim MSP, represented the SNP. On the opening day of the Third Scottish Parliament, he wore traditional Pakistani dress and took his oath of office using both the Urdu and English language.[39] An interesting counterpoint can be seen in 2016 when Humza Yousaf, now an SNP Cabinet Minister, also took the oath using Urdu and English but did so wearing a kilt. The Washington Post in its coverage called this "an emphatic demonstration of British [sic] multiculturalism".[40] These are highly stylized and ritualized individual examples, but they run counter to what is routinely named as characterizing nationalist and populist styles in politics. In fact, while all the other parties have accused the Conservatives of support for racist immigration policies, issues of racism and ethnocentrism are not otherwise weaponized in recent Scottish political discourse, because there has been consistent civic leadership across the SNP, Labour, the Scottish Greens, and the Scottish Liberal Democrats. The only time it is raised as an issue, is when the SNP is accused of being anti-English and that accusation is never parsed in terms of other forms of racism. Given the difficulties Labour has had over antisemitism and the Conservatives have had over

38 See https://onescotland.org/about/ (accessed November 30, 2020).

39 See Andrew Black, "MSPs at their best for ceremony," BBC News, May 9, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/6638173.stm (accessed November 30, 2020).

40 Ishaan Tharoor, "Watch: Muslim politician in a kilt swears oath in Urdu to British queen," *The Washington Post*, May 13, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/05/13/watch-muslim-politician-in-a-kilt-swears-oath-in-urdu-to-british-queen/ (accessed November 30, 2020).

immigration policies and their Brexit linked portrayal of British identity, there is an argument for saying that the SNP has the strongest record of anti-racism of any party in UK politics. This makes them an exemplar of a distinctive type of nationalism and populism, which even if it is relatively rare, demands recognition and consideration in academic analysis.

The point is not that racism and Islamophobia are not problems in Scotland, it is that parties of the left and center-left in Scotland, both Scottish nationalist and 'unionist'/British nationalist are united in their agreement that they do exist, that they are problems, and that government should lead in tackling them. So Humza Yousaf (SNP) and Anas Sarwar (Labour) appeared together in 2018 to voice their response to Islamophobia.[41] The SNP's rhetoric, publications, policy stances (including on dog-whistle topics like immigration) and record in government, while littered with mistakes and compromises in many areas, shows no trace of attempting to mobilize or weaponize any kind of anti-Black or anti-Muslim/Hindu/Sikh sentiment (or any kind of prejudice against any minorities) in the way that catch-all accounts of nationalism and populism would predict. In contrast, their rhetoric values an understanding of home and of deep cultural traditions but combines this with expressing a spirit of hospitality towards refugees and asylum seekers (which is markedly more open than that of the UK government) and a celebration of cultural diversity and hybridity, the emerging culture of 'New Scots.' This makes them and Scotland an intriguing example of attempts to craft an internationalist nationalism and an inclusive populism, although one which remains very much, in O'Donovan's terms, a work in progress.

41 See "Racism and Islamophobia 'getting worse in Scotland,'" *BBC News*, March 18, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-scotland-43450251 (accessed November 30, 2020). See also the cross-party initiative "Tackling Islamophobia" at https://www.parliament.scot/msps/tackling-islamophobia.aspx (accessed November 30, 2020). For a probing analysis of how policy can develop see Nasar Meer "Looking up in Scotland? Multinationalism, multiculturalism and political elites," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 9 (2015): 1477–1496.

PART 4

Responses

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CHAPTER 15

A Political Theology of 'The People': Enlisting Classical Concepts for Contemporary Critique

Jonathan Chaplin

Scholarly proposals regarding the nature of populism are abundant, but for the purpose of this chapter, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin's summary of four interlinked aspirations of populism, in *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*, will suffice. Populism, they propose, seeks

> to reassert the primacy of the nation over distant and unaccountable international organizations; to reassert cherished and rooted national identities over rootless and diffuse transnational ones; to reassert the importance of stability and conformity over the never-ending and disruptive instability that flows from globalization and rapid ethnic change; and to reassert the will of the people over those of elitist liberal democrats who appear increasingly detached from the life experiences and outlooks of the average citizen.[1]

Eatwell and Goodwin argue that these subjective aspirations are fueled by four long-term objective societal changes—the "Four Ds:" *distrust* at politicians generated by the elitist nature of liberal democracy; fears about the possible *destruction* of the nation's historic cultural identity driven by sudden mass immigration; the growth of a sense of relative *deprivation* following from rising

1 Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London: Pelican, 2018), xxxii. While broadly endorsing the institutions of liberal democracy, they argue that in practice liberal democracy has always displayed an 'elitist' distrust of the people. Adrian Pabst, *The Demons of Liberal Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019) makes a similar case. See also Alberto Martinelli's summary of key elements of populism: "the two concepts of 'people' (as the legitimate source of power) and 'community' (as the legitimate criterion for defining the people), the antagonistic relationship between two homogeneous groups, *We* (the pure, virtuous people) and *Them* (the corrupt, inefficient, and negligent elite or establishment); the absolute right of the majority against the minority; the denial of pluralism and intermediation." Martinelli, "Populism and Nationalism: The (Peculiar) Case of Italy," in *When Populism Meets Nationalism*, ed. Alberto Martinelli (Milan: Ledizioni Ledi Publishing, 2018), 13–46, at 17.

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economic inequality; and a continuing process of *de-alignment*, the weakening of bonds between traditional parties and the people.[2]

In this chapter I argue that a theological diagnosis of and response to populism requires a normative account of 'the people'—the *populus*—and not only a descriptive account of its current dynamics. As Ulrich Schmiedel shows in the introduction to this volume, descriptive accounts in political science in any case rely explicitly or tacitly on normative criteria by which such movements are defined and assessed.[3] Often, such criteria assume the legitimacy of principles of 'liberal democracy' widely accepted among European political and intellectual elites. This chapter affirms many of the institutional components of liberal democracy while framing them in a way that, I hope, better illumines the nature of populism. It offers a preliminary outline of a theologically-inflected conception of 'the people' that resists exclusivist populisms, while also championing a robust notion of the political identity and agency of 'the people.' It argues that such identity and agency should be construed in terms of the normative purpose of 'the political community.' This purpose is defined by drawing ecumenically on both a traditional Catholic conception of 'the common good' and a Reformed conception of 'justice.'[4] I do not *describe* such historical sources but *deploy* them in addressing the pathologies and possibilities of populism. Contemporary political theologies often explicitly invoke or tacitly assume some notion of 'the people,' rightly affirming its centrality to the field and championing 'the people'—especially 'the poor'—against their economic oppressors, imperial overlords or cultured despisers.[5] Yet for all their

2 Eatwell and Godwin, *National Populism*, xxi–xxiii. Their analysis has proved controversial, not least because it appears not to reckon fully with populism's darker sides—its nativist, xenophobic, anti-pluralist, authoritarian and racist tendencies.

3 See Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

4 The Reformed strand is the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century movement known as 'neo-Calvinism,' especially the thought of legal philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. See Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011). This, and the Catholic strand on which I draw (classical Thomism), both emerged from theologically traditional sources. Here I deploy them to yield outcomes that are critical of exclusivist populism.

5 Examples are as diverse as the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, IN: Orbis, 1971); John De Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Oliver O'Donovan's notion of the people as a traditioned moral community in his *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and his *Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); and Luke Bretherton's theology of 'democratic politics' in his *Christ and the Common Life: Political Theology and the Case for Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019).

explanatory and normative power, these often lack precise definitions of the *uniquely political* meaning of 'the people.' One way to remedy this is critically to retrieve key concepts emerging from 'classical' political theology. The most foundational, I suggest, is the concept of the 'political community.'

1 The Political Community

One theologically-informed conception of 'the political community' would take the form of a constructive, normative account of the polity as a necessary human institution ordered to justice and the common good. My version is a variant of a teleological conception of the polity in which enduring human institutions such as this one are seen to disclose an inherent normative telos at work, even in the face of formidable countervailing forces that would forestall its emergence or thwart its proper ends. In such a conception, central concepts of politics—citizenship, political equality, nation, sovereignty, representation, and participation and so forth—are orchestrated around an account of the definitive purposes of the political community. The ensuing ensemble of concepts then yields a critical benchmark of 'the people' against which to assess populism.

By 'political community' I mean the enduring institutional relationship that comes to exist between those who exercise political authority in any territorially-delimited society and the permanent members of that society. This relationship creates a specific kind of 'community' (though not an intimate or affective one). A political community is narrower in scope than what Luke Bretherton terms "the common life," a notion that risks conflating the political with the societal and the cultural.[6] The political community is one mode of common life alongside many others. The modern state remains the most pervasive and powerful form of the political community, but there have been many others in the past and there are many others existing today, including sub-national units and a variety of inter- or supra-national entities.[7] I propose that such political forms arise not as mere accidents of history but as conduits for the seemingly ubiquitous human desire for justice, order, and well-being in

6 Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, 32–37.

7 Some of the latter are functional rather than territorial (such as the IMF, WTO or ILO), and where they are territorial it is not always clear that one can speak of 'members.' We can speak of individual 'members' (citizens) of the EU, and of 'member states,' but 'members' of the UN are states rather than individuals. 'Empire' names a category of transnational state that, I would argue, almost invariably breaches the proper purposes of a political community, even when it provides paternalistic benefits.

the public realm of society—a desire expressive of divinely created aspirations and capacities (however extremely varied the specific institutional arrangements established to pursue those aspirations). Give human corruptibility, of course, every instance of political community inevitably falls well short of its defining purpose, and many are oppressive or predatory from the start—such as many examples of the modern state itself, notwithstanding its emancipatory effects for many. Political communities as often repress their citizens in some respects as they liberate them in others, perpetrating injustice even as they seek to redress it.[8] Integral features of a political community, such as the determination of territory, are often themselves the outcome of violent conquest or coercive displacement rather than any just ordering of political space. Equally, within a political community 'the people' are as prone to human corruptibility as their political authorities—a claim immediately subverting any populist romanticizing of 'the people.' Yet the human aspiration towards institutions of public justice unfailingly recurs, if only as a standing indictment of those we find ourselves actually residing in. This is the minimal sense in which my account is 'teleological.'[9]

What are the characteristic purposes of the political community? In the Christian tradition these have been captured in a variety of terms, including peace, public order and safety, public morality, the common weal, and so forth, but the most comprehensive and enduring have been 'justice' (relatively more prominent in the Protestant tradition) and 'the common good' (relatively more prominent in Catholicism). Each has been understood as enjoining an ordered ensemble of morally substantive public conditions for a flourishing social order, including, for example, personal and associational liberty, family, stability, civil peace, guarantees of basic material and social needs and (today) protection of fragile ecological goods. 'Justice' and 'common good' admit of multiple definitions, but in classical Christian thought they function as complex, multi-layered concepts resisting reduction to singular, abstract principles such as fairness, equality, order, dignity or liberty.[10] Such principles do find their place in the classical repertoire, but their contents are determined

8 There is a longstanding critique in pre-modern Christian thought of 'tyranny.' Today this would include authoritarian, despotic or totalitarian regimes, sometimes designated theologically as 'idolatrous' or 'demonic.'

9 This is less robust than Thomas', but more robust than Bretherton's. See Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, 424.

10 See Jonathan Chaplin, "'Justice,' the 'Common Good,' and the Scope of State Authority: Pointers to Protestant-Thomist Convergence,'" in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, ed. Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 287–306.

by what makes for personal and societal flourishing as this is given in creation, providence, and redemption and as these are unfolded in highly diverse historical circumstances.

The political community is that specific human community fitted to (in Thomistic language, 'ordered to') pursuing the fundamental requirements of justice and the common good in the public realm of a territorial society. All humans, and particular associations, have specific duties to justice and to the common good, but the political community is unique in being authorized to oversee the realization of these goals in the whole public realm. To give one example of immediate relevance to populism: the mandate of the political community includes the active promotion of just distributions of economic resources, opportunities, and public respect among its citizens, and across its regions and localities, via a wide array of laws and policies. Insofar as political communities permit systemic and demeaning inequalities (including 'relative deprivations') among its people, it is failing in its duties both of justice and of representation and it is no surprise when political movements arise in protest. One telling symptom of this protest, 'de-alignment' from mainstream parties and rising support for populist ones, signals that traditional structures of representation have failed in their task of discerning and delivering the demands of justice and the common good. The first question to ask of populism then, however ugly its manifestations, is whether it is revelatory of genuine injustices that political communities have allowed to fester unacknowledged and unaddressed.

2 The People

What idea of 'the people' follows from this conception of the political community? I elaborate five of its dimensions.

First, 'the people' is a specifically 'political' category. 'The people' are the citizenry, the whole body of citizens equally entitled to and obliged to serve as active participants in the purposes of the political community and as authorizers of those who will exercise the offices of political authority. In Reformed language, the political community has a normative 'calling' to seek those ends; and its members, both as individual citizens and collectively as 'the people,' share fully in that calling, though they may often fail to fulfil it. The political community unites members in this specifically political and legal role, not in other roles such as members of an ethnic or cultural group, religious confession, profession or class of property-holders. Christian political thought is, then, already radically 'populist' in fundamentally affirming the indispensable

political identity and agency of 'the people.'[11] Where the people unite behind the search for justice and the common good, they *become* a 'people' and take up their rightful place in the political community as a whole.

Such a 'political' conception of the people contrasts categorically with cultural or ethnic conceptions appealed to by national populists. This type of populism looks to the political community primarily to defend the interests of 'the nation' construed as a culturally distinct community (an *ethnos*) and defined by some combination of common history, territory, language, ethnicity, race, religion, values or customs.[12] From a theological point of view, nationhood and national identity should be construed as phenomena arising from the historical unfolding of created human needs and aspiration; a feeling of attachment to a nation is thus in principle natural and legitimate.[13] But they are not creational givens or orders of nature; nor are they possessed of divinely conferred identities or destinies. Nations are complex, evolving, porous, and frequently contested amalgams of multiple elements that resist reification or essentialization. While nations may display recognizable continuity over time, and their affiliates may possess varying degrees of self-consciousness about their nationality, nations themselves lack stable identity or effective agency. This is the valid meaning of Bretherton's assertion that 'the nation does not assemble.'[14] 'The people' in my sense, however, do indeed assemble and possess agency.

The contrast between political and cultural ideas of nation implies that cultural nationalism (of which ethnic or 'integral' nationalism is a pernicious extreme[15]) must be distinguished from 'civic nationalism' such as that

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11 This political conception of the people partially contrasts with that of Oliver O'Donovan, which in my view tends to conflate the political, the cultural, and the societal. See O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 150. See also my "Representing a People: Oliver O'Donovan on Democracy and Tradition," *Political Theology* 9, no. 3 (2008): 295–307.

12 This cultural ideal of the nation is a distinctly modern one; and national*ism* is the creation of the modern state. The idea that political authorities were charged with defending the specific cultural traits of the people which they governed was not unknown before the modern period but was rarely explicit and never dominant. Of course, such traits existed long before the rise of the modern state and they persist irrespective of people's subjective perception of them. In that sense nations are not solely 'imagined' communities.

13 Nigel Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis: An Ethic of the Nation* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2014), 1–25.

14 Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, 422.

15 'Integral' or 'organic' nationalism is a destabilizing and often pernicious doctrine holding that the borders of states must coincide with those of ethnically defined nations. This is what Schmiedel in "Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism" refers to as the "horizontal" notion of the people: the people as *ethnos.* A deeply flawed but surprisingly influential

in Scotland—as eloquently defended by Reformed theologian Doug Gay.[16] On my conception of the political community, civic nationalism is legitimate insofar as the content of the term 'civic' is *controlled by the purposes of the political community*; that is, insofar as the claims of *culture* pass muster at the bar of *justice and the common good*. It is certainly plausible to discern within these purposes a duty to sustain certain aspects of a national culture that bear upon the discharge of the political community's purposes. These might include language, distinctive political practices or institutions (such as Scots law), robust associational life,[17] markers of historical memory, publicly significant senses of 'place,' and so forth.[18] In *this* sense, any political community is entitled to be 'civically nationalist.' A limited remit to protect national culture(s) can be discharged without necessarily rendering those who do not strongly identify with that national culture as an out-group or in other ways impairing their equal standing. To sustain some predominant national traits of the 'host' or 'majority' culture must be done without marginalizing or disrespecting minority cultures or ethnicities (which is not to deny the need for some complex trade-offs). Accordingly, insofar as the demands of justice mandate a proper public respect for such cultures, a qualified defense of 'multiculturalism' ensues.[19]

The political community, then, is not to be conflated with 'the nation,' nor with an association of nations existing within its territory. The term 'nation-state' has thus always been inherently problematic, failing to describe accurately the plural fabric of national and cultural affiliations prevalent in most actual states. The imperatives of justice and the common good may override culturally- or ethnically-rooted demands where these threaten such larger public norms.

Here, however, a significant objection arises: is it not the case that a people's understanding of the demands of justice and the common good are unavoidably mediated through the lens of particular cultural traditions, so that to ask

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(in the USA at least) recent defense of it is Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York: Basic Book, 2018).

16 See Doug Gay, *Honey from the Rock: Christianity and the Ethics of Nationalism* (London: SCM, 2013). See also Doug Gay, "Discipling Populism: A Theopolitical Alternative to Denial or Demonizing," in this volume.

17 As legal historian Otto von Gierke noted was characteristic of German culture. See his *Community in Historical Perspective*, trans. Mary Fischer, ed. Anthony Black (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

18 I read Doug Gay's account of Scottish nationalism as doing just this. One might then say that civic nationalism could justify a claim for political independence insofar as a nation's distinctive readings of justice and the common good are being systematically frustrated by the larger political unit in which it is bound.

19 Jonathan Chaplin, *Multiculturalism: A Christian Retrieval* (London: Theos, 2011).

a people to draw bright lines between 'culture' and 'politics' is futile, perhaps even illiberal. Why, for example, should the English people not be permitted to defend an 'English justice' rooted in common law against a 'European justice' rooted in civil law? My recognition that the political community is entitled to protect politically salient features of a national culture does allow for this possibility. The decisive question is whether such a national trait can be defended, not *as English*, as if that were sufficient to justify a political ruling, but as a *culturally modulated expression of justice*. If a plausible case can be mounted that, say, an aspect of common law genuinely advances a widely recognizable justice claim (and not a culturally or ethnically idiosyncratic, or palpably inhumane, one), then, *ceteris paribus*, that case must be heard. But like all political claims, such a case is contestable and must survive the test of critical democratic deliberation over what justice requires. Nationalist or populist appeals to the *conclusive* authority of culture (a distinct to its prospective plausibility) must be resisted.

Second, the deepest ground of political authority is the purpose of the polis, not the 'will of the people.' A fundamental feature of my conception is that it inverts the dominant liberal contractarian view that the normative purpose of a political community can only finally be determined and justified by appeal to the aggregated autonomous wills of citizens—by 'popular sovereignty.' It is true that some strands of Christian political thought have embraced the idea of a 'contract' between government and people which is seen as binding both covenantally to the purposes of the political community; some have even affirmed the idea that the people possess 'constituent power,' that is, the power actually to constitute a political community and not merely authorize its officeholders.[20] But even this constituent power has always been seen as pursuant to a larger purpose, one deriving not from the sovereign will of the people but directing and constraining it. Powerful strands of the Christian tradition have insisted that the primary basis of legitimacy in a polity is its actual practice of justice and the common good; popular consent is certainly necessary, but derivative.

My conception not only inverts liberal contractualism but also subverts conservative traditionalism. For the latter, the primordial source of political authority is the cultural nation whose legitimacy is ultimately vindicated by historical longevity. It is true that an awareness of historical continuity can validly shore up a nation's self-confidence and its trust in its inherited political

20 See *Constitutionalism and Resistance in the Sixteenth Century: Three Treatises by Hotman, Beza, and Mornay*, ed. Julian H. Franklin (New York: Pegasus, 1969).

institutions. But it is insufficient to ground the authority of the political community in which it is located, even when it embraces the overwhelming majority of the citizens of that polity. Equally, awareness of the historical continuity of a nation must embrace the deep pathologies of the nation and the injustices and oppressions to which they have given rise (such as the 'original sins' of racism in the USA and colonialism in England). A critical discernment of 'tradition' should therefore instill in a nation's members a radical humility about its past and present. Historical longevity itself might testify only to might not right.

Third, political authority is pluriform not singular. Below I define the 'members' of a political community; here, let me define its 'parts.' Collectively, these are the structured array of offices and organizations making up its institutional leadership, including the functionally distinct 'organs of state'—executive, legislature, judiciary—and their various parts (for example, civil service, military, public bodies of many kinds), and any vertical sub-national units.[21] Both Catholic and Protestant political thought have endorsed, or at least tolerated, a wide variety of such forms (including, heretically, absolute monarchy). Yet it is possible to discern in several of their strands a recurrent preference for some version of 'mixed government' embodying principles of complementarity, dispersed authority, and mutual accountability. Thus, for example, both traditions have often espoused a notion of 'sovereignty,' not as absolute authority, but as highest legal jurisdiction within a devolved and pluralistic constitutional order.[22] Equally, these tradition have mostly rejected bare invocations of 'the will of the people,' on the grounds that this notion both rests on a false reification of numerical majorities, and disturbs the proper balance between the mutually limiting parts of the political community (such as between executives and parliaments, between them and the courts, or between different vertical tiers of the polity). Many populist invocations of the will of the people fall foul of both errors, on account of the inordinate trust they invest in powerful leaders presumptuously claiming to embody 'the people' in themselves. Such errors are the more grievous insofar as such leaders identify only one section of the body of citizens ('real people') as standing for the whole, and pitting this section against institutions of state (parliaments, bureaucracies or courts) that seem to stand in their way and that are then branded as 'enemies of the people.'

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21 Such parts possess very different degrees and kinds of political authority depending on the polity concerned.

22 See John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 205–244.

Fourth, citizenship—understood as a political status not merely a legal entitlement—is to be interpreted as a 'calling' possessed equally by all members of the people. I defined the political community as a bond between political authorities and the 'permanent members' of a society. The 'members' of the political community are individual citizens. Citizens are, of course, also 'subjects,' standing under the jurisdiction of governmental authorities. But a great achievement of modernity, building on pre-modern Christian theories of representation and consent, was to recognize that subjects of political rule can also be active participants in the definition and realization of the purposes of the political community, potential speakers of political truth and co-legitimators of its officeholders, and not mere passive recipients of the judgments and rulings of those officeholders, however beneficent the latter's intentions might be. This is the fundamental ground for a Christian endorsement of a range of institutions and processes typical of a representative and participatory democracy.[23]

To spell this out further requires a brief elaboration of the meaning of political equality. On my conception, this is fundamental to the very idea of a political community. In the Christian tradition a defense of political equality flowed (in time, and often against enormous resistance) from a recognition that the fundamental *spiritual* equality of humans as made 'in the image of God' (Gen. 1:27) and as redeemed so that Jew, Greek, male, female, slave and free are all 'one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28), also has inescapable *political* corollaries. The upshot of this trajectory of thought is that the status of citizen must be enjoyed equally by all who are born in the relevant territory or have joined themselves to it by some process of 'naturalization.' Equal citizenship means, in turn, equal entitlement to what has now become an extensive set of legal and political rights; equal access to employment in or election or appointment to any part of the political community; equal legal subjection to a defined set of duties such as obeying the law, paying taxes, and, perhaps, speaking a national language; and an equal political obligation to display the virtues and take up the practices of active citizenship.

Over the centuries, the question of who actually counts as a 'citizen' has, of course, proved viscerally controversial and such controversy is returning with a vengeance in contemporary national populism. The dynamic of the Christian tradition, as I read it, is premised on the radical commitment to equal human worth and the rejection of arbitrary exclusions from full political

23 See Jonathan Chaplin, *Faith in Democracy: Framing a Politics of Deep Diversity* (London: SCM, 2021).

membership. Eligibility for citizenship is not to be conditional upon the possession of characteristics, such as rank, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth, *that are irrelevant to participation in the pursuit of the purposes of the political community*. There are no second-class citizens. Equally, there should, ideally, be no passive citizens: citizenship is a demanding civic duty, even though its actual fulfilment is subject to people's diverse resources, capacities, and opportunities as well as their possession of civic virtues. Minimally, entitlement to citizenship presupposes a commitment to upholding the fundamental political (not cultural) norms of the political community, and it is right that states expect such a commitment from both existing citizens and would-be new ones.[24]

The distinction between citizens and other residents of a territory remains valid but must be defined precisely. Citizens are those who have a long-term stake in a political community by virtue either of being born there (in which case for them it is a community of fate, at least until they leave) or of having become a citizen by meeting certain criteria deemed by that society to be reasonable expectations of those enjoying the benefits of long-term residence (in which case for them it is a community of choice, if not always an entirely free choice).[25] Christian political thinkers have not generally proposed that the political community has a duty to admit unconditionally all and any to membership of or even permanent residence in it, but this is not because of any lingering prioritizing of the people as *ethnos* but only because the doing of justice and the common good on behalf of the *demos* might thereby be impaired. Yet citizens are always citizens of particular political communities (some of which could also be transnational, such as the EU). Thus, it is legitimate, and in view of the pressures of rising population movements today, necessary, for a state to establish an immigration policy determining who may enter and on what conditions. Unconditional 'freedom of movement' into a political community is not an imperative of Christian political theology. The criteria of any immigration policy need careful specification according to principles of justice, decided by careful democratic deliberation not by manipulative appeals to popular fears. Minimally, such criteria must be consistent with the same

24 These need to be much more robust and specific than the bland list of four 'British values' defined by the UK government as required to be promoted in schools: the rule of law, democracy, freedom, tolerance. These are obviously not uniquely (even typically) British and with further specification they mean little and can easily be exploited for exclusivist rhetorical purposes.

25 'Permanent residency' is a half-way house to citizenship, and will incur less onerous obligations and less capacious rights.

principle of non-discrimination as applies to citizenship itself: the political community may not arbitrarily exclude people from candidacy for citizenship on grounds of race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and so forth.[26]

The actual capacity of a political community responsibly to host new members—to treat them with justice and dignity upon arrival—is an important contingent question, depending, for example, on the economic effects of immigration, the resilience of public services, the degree of civic virtue currently possessed by the citizenry, and the capacity of leaders to summon citizens to greater degrees of such virtue (a formidable challenge, as Angela Merkel discovered during her impressive, if regrettably unilateral, response to the European migrant crisis of 2015). It is clear that rapid, large-scale immigration without wide popular consent, such as occurred in Britain during the 2000s, is experienced by some citizens in some localities as an economic or cultural threat and as compounding their existing sense of marginalization. This is one of the plausible arguments of David Goodhart's *The Road to Somewhere.*[27] Whether or not these fears are well-grounded (evidence on the economic impact of immigration is disputed), their existence creates a political problem that political communities must manage, and that may require more restrictive (or more liberal) immigration policies in some settings. That said, all human beings, whatever their political status, bear some minimal, fundamental interests that must be universally recognized. These are widely captured today in the language of 'human rights,' although there are other ways to name them. All political communities are bound to respect such fundamental human interests; this is the foundation of the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers (for whom the state must therefore stand ready to serve as a 'community of refuge'). This is part of what it means to say that, whatever their home political community, humans are also 'citizens of the world:' they are entitled, at least, to those rights defined as universal in international human

26 This raises the question whether economic standing (minimum income or capital) is a valid ground for denying someone permanent residence (as distinct to refugee or asylum status). I think it is reasonable for states to expect candidates for permanent residency to have an expectation of being able to support themselves (or be supported by family or other sponsors) for a period of time before they are fully entitled to the full range of welfare or other benefits available to others. That does not require proof of minimum income or capital, which I think is needlessly restrictive.

27 David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (London: Hurst & Co, 2017), esp. 117–145 For a telling concrete local example, see Ben Quinn, "'It's fearmongering:' talk of coup fails to impress Brexit-backing Grays," *The Guardian*, August 29, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/aug/29/its-fearmongering-talk-of-coup-fails-to-impress-brexit-backing-grays (accessed August 5, 2020).

rights codes.[28] To impose arbitrary religious, cultural or ethnic barriers to entry on people in such a desperate plight, as the 'Christian national' government of Victor Orbán sought to do in response to the refugee crisis of 2015, plainly violates the Christian norm of hospitality to strangers (which includes but exceeds the satisfaction of human rights).

The foregoing account of the scope of political equality and the demands of human equality suggests a combination of a cautious immigration policy with a maximally generous refugee and asylum policy. It also suggests that, while the distinction between citizen and non-citizen remains valid, and while there may also be temporary 'enemies' when a state is at war, to reify the 'friend-enemy' distinction as a necessary category of political experience (as Carl Schmitt does[29]) is radically unacceptable from a theological point of view.

Fifth, 'the people' exercise their political agency via multiple sites and processes of representation and participation. The people have both individual and collective roles in pursuing the purposes of justice and the common good. Such roles embrace a multi-faceted set of activities, including not only voting in elections but the no less important continuing tasks of discerning, through reflection on experience and through public debate, what the requirements of justice and the common good mean for this time, this place, this issue; of summoning political authorities to realize those requirements; and of calling them to democratic account when they fail.[30] The particular manifestations of this wide-ranging representative and participatory mandate will vary considerably according to time and circumstance. Bretherton rightly argues that, given the corruptibility of all political communities, this role of the people is always likely to break out into 'populist' uprisings against any political community's likely crises of representation.[31] No political community will ever attain

28 I should add that this point is only one instance of the much broader question of how distinct political communities should relate to each other and to the wider global order, on which there is much more to say of relevance to populism than space allows here.

29 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

30 Naming the political task of the people as 'discerning justice and the common good' is rather different to the standard way of defining what liberal democratic citizens are thought to do, namely promote their 'interests' or their 'rights.' The contrast is not total, however. In the Christian tradition, conceptions of justice and the common good, suitably fleshed out, embrace a wide range of individual, local, associational or other particular interests, needs, aspirations, opportunities, liberties and so forth. The common good is not an alternative to particular interests but their *just integration*. Such interests, however, need a better justification than the mere assertion of will or preference.

31 Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, 424, 431. This concern echoes the "vertical" notion of the people alluded to by Schmiedel in "Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism": the people as *demos* defending itself against an indifferent or oppressive elite.

a position of perfect representative equipoise where no further corrections are needed—when it can, finally, be 'at ease' with itself (as politicians love to promise). On the contrary, the people must remain in a state of constant vigilance against breaches of justice and the common good and thus will always require 'prophets of unease.' Populism *in this sense* is indeed a 'perennial feature of forms of rule that include democratic elements.'[32]

Furthermore, it is important to make clear that what I have termed the 'collective' role of the people does not consist primarily in episodic, dramatic plenary acts such as national elections or referenda where 'the people' appear to act as one.[33] Much more frequently it consists in successive acts of quotidian political participation mediated by a wide range of specific associations (political parties, campaigning groups, NGOs, trade unions, professional bodies, and so forth), networks, movements or initiatives. The vast bulk of effective political activity occurs through such channels of mediation, the leaders of which also function as 'people's representatives' no less important than elected ones. These are the operative channels through which the people discern the concrete implications of justice and the common good and promote them by bringing influence to bear on other citizens and on political authorities. In particular, the associations of 'civil society' serve as indispensable 'schools of civic virtue' and formative crucibles of political discernment.[34] My account of the people is thus resolutely Althusian and Tocquevillian rather than Hobbesian and Rousseauan. It rejects monistic and absolutist conceptions of 'sovereignty' and champions the diffusion of social authority across many mutually limiting institutional agents, including not only vertical tiers of governmental authority within the political community (as in federalism and localism) but also horizontal dispersals of authority in civil society.[35] Such a model repudiates populist attempts to inflate the importance of direct, unmediated and thus easily manipulable relations between leader and people and diminish the importance of these vital conduits of mediated popular discernment and action. This alerts us to the importance of attending to what have been termed

32 Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, 432.

33 Or at least, those who show up. Thus the mantra-like invocation in the Brexit debate of the demand of '17.4 million' who voted Leave, which is only a minority of voting citizens, is in fact an admission of failure.

34 This is partly what Bretherton has in mind in speaking of the people being engaged in "assembly," a process through which people are formed as citizens, or "peopled" (Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, 407–408, 422).

35 For sources of pluralism, see Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 5–19; Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, 359–399; Robert Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers* (St. Albans, Herts: Paladin, 1976), 387–444.

both the 'demand-side' and the 'supply-side' of populism.[36] The former refers to the subjective perceptions and feelings of the heterogeneous coalition of voters who experience the effects of the "Four Ds" and are thus drawn towards populism. The latter refers to the strategies and tactics used by populist leaders seeking to articulate those aspirations while often exploiting them for the purposes of securing power. No attempt to restore popular trust in political leaderships (those detested 'elites') can succeed if it bypasses the hard work of reviving the associations and networks of civil society and forming new leadership cadres in civil society and politics committed to particular visions of justice and the common good.[37] Equally, where such a differentiated fabric of popular representation exists, populism will struggle to gain traction: the 'waves' of populist sentiment will find themselves crashing against, and thus at least slowed by, the 'breakers' of a robust civil society.

3 Enacting 'Peoplehood'

In this chapter I have discussed just some of the ways in which a conception of the political community informed by longstanding traditions of Christian political thought might make possible a discriminating analysis of both the pathologies and possibilities of populism. I hope that this preliminary sketch at least shows the promise of enlisting classical concepts of political theology for the purposes of more precisely targeted contemporary critique. The outcome of this analysis affirms Bretherton's judgment that populism "is an inherent, and often benign, feature of democratic politics, yet, as with all forms of politics, it can become toxic."[38] I close by cautioning that, in order to resist populism's toxicities, it will be not enough simply to expose and denounce its pathologies. An alternative practice of 'peoplehood' to that driving populism must be enacted. We must, as John Milbank might say, "out-narrate" it.[39]

36 Daphne Halikiopoulou, "Understanding far-right populists: focus on their message," *Social Europe*, May 16, 2019, https://www.socialeurope.eu/far-right-populists (accessed August 5, 2020).

37 Scottish nationalism achieved the success it did in the 2014 independence referendum in part because it had done just that.

38 Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, 432.

39 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 330. As Halikiopoulou, "Understanding far-right populists," puts it: "instead of co-opting or imitating far-right populists under the false assumption that their success simply mirrors the 'will of the people,'" we should "understand this new winning formula and recognise their own ability, as well as responsibility, to frame an effective alternative political narrative, rather than sanitise the populists."

CHAPTER 16

Can Jewish Ethics Speak to Sovereignty?

Julie E. Cooper

Sovereignty remains one of the most contested political issues of our time.[1] To take one example: In his September 2017 speech to the United Nations, Donald Trump used the word 'sovereign' (or 'sovereignty') twenty-one times.[2] Noting this tenacity is not tantamount to conceding that the contest has been decided in sovereignty's favor; it merely indicates the high stakes of the struggles highlighted by ethno-nationalist populism inside and outside the United States. I am interested in the notion of sovereignty that is often assumed, as Ulrich Schmiedel argues, in the discourse on populism.[3]

In this chapter, I examine whether Jewish ethics can contribute meaningfully to these controversies. Prominent scholars on the (American) academic left have argued that studying Jewish ethics can help us to diagnose sovereignty's dangers—and, ideally, recast political community in non-sovereign terms. The reliance on Jewish ethics is not altogether surprising, given that Zionism and the State of Israel are among the pet examples of scholars who condemn sovereignty as an inherently flawed ideal. In the Western imagination, the figure of the Jew has traditionally symbolized statelessness. Yet, starting in the 2000s, critics began to depict the State of Israel as the paradigmatic sovereign nation. Theorists determined to release political "thought and practice from the dream of sovereign power" have argued that the Zionist case offers an especially powerful demonstration of sovereignty's violent, exclusionary logic.[4] Similarly, Jewish critics of Zionism often trace the movement's failings to its supposed commitment to the sovereign paradigm. Yet critics who adduce the

1 This chapter is an updated version of a previously published essay. For the original, longer version of the essay, see Julie E. Cooper, "Can Jewish Ethics Speak to Sovereignty?," *Journal of Jewish Ethics* 4, no. 2 (2018): 109–135.

2 Mark Landler, "Trump Offers a Selective View of Sovereignty in U.N. Speech," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/19/world/trump-speech-united-nations.html (accessed August 10, 2020). See also Brian Klug, "'If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem:' Zionism and the Politics of Collective Memory," in this volume.

3 See Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

4 Joan Cocks, *On Sovereignty and Other Political Delusions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2.

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Zionist case do not only reject "the dream of sovereign power"—they also tout (Jewish) ethics as a theoretical counterweight. Thus, Jewish critics of Zionism have identified the adoption of diasporic Jewish values as a sine qua non for the establishment of a more just regime in Israel/Palestine, a regime that rejects the logic of sovereignty.[5] For critics of sovereignty, it is precisely Judaism's ethical teachings—as opposed to, say, the rabbinic legal corpus—that harbor transformative political promise.

I hope to temper the widespread enthusiasm for ethics as a framework for arbitrating conflicts over sovereignty, territory, and political enfranchisement. To challenge the presumption in favor of ethics, I offer a markedly different take on the Zionist example. On my reading, the Zionist case, which purportedly vindicates the political promise of ethics, actually exposes their comparative political impotence. As we will see, the controversy surrounding the political purchase of (Jewish) ethics predates the establishment of the State of Israel. Indeed, in the interwar period, Zionist intellectuals debated the wisdom of investing political energy in projects of ethical cultivation. In this chapter, I seek to acquaint contemporary critics with this internal Zionist debate. I revisit this historical episode to challenge assumptions about the relationship between ethics and politics that underwrite ethical approaches to the critique of sovereignty. Contrary to what contemporary critics suggest, reservations regarding ethics need not express a dogmatic commitment to the sovereign state. In the early twentieth century, it was precisely an appreciation for the political vitality of diasporic Jewish communities that led some Zionist thinkers to reject a politics centered upon the promotion of 'Jewish values.' In other words, the turn to ethics aroused opposition from within the precincts of non-sovereign political thought.

I aim to divert attention from 'the usual suspects'—that is, the luminaries (mostly French and German) of modern Jewish thought. I propose that we study texts of a more polemical bent, written largely by Eastern European Jews. After WWI, the dire predicament of Eastern European Jews pushed nationalist thinkers of all types to debate regimes for national autonomy, self-determination, and self-rule. The annals of Jewish nationalism arguably constitute one of the richest nodes of theoretical reflection upon the merits of sovereign and non-sovereign regimes. Yet these texts have largely been ignored by political theorists and scholars of modern Jewish thought. This oversight is unfortunate,

5 Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 2, 6. To avoid the implication that these values are exclusively Jewish—and to avoid treating Jewishness as a static entity—Butler calls them "Jewish/not Jewish."

I argue, because these texts offer a framing of the controversy surrounding sovereignty that departs from both the Schmittian rubric of political theology and from contemporary idioms of ethical critique. By revisiting this corpus, I venture, critics of sovereignty can expand the theoretical repertoire, replacing appeals to moral conviction with a study of institutions and practices.

In this spirit, I devote the bulk of this chapter to the work of Jakob Klatzkin (1882–1948), a philosopher, editor, translator, and Zionist intellectual. Klatzkin has received scant attention in English-language scholarship. This neglect is not altogether surprising, given that little of Klatzkin's voluminous oeuvre has been translated from the original German and Hebrew.[6] Yet Klatzkin's comparative obscurity may also reflect aspects of his work that prove difficult to assimilate to familiar rubrics. Although classified as "the most radical denier of any possibility of a future Jewish life in the Diaspora," Klatzkin never moved to Palestine.[7] Moreover, Klatzkin's penchant for polemical stridency can make for uncomfortable reading—as when he dismisses the Jewish demand for equal rights as evidence of craven assimilationism. In short, Klatzkin resists neat appropriation as a prophetic voice of moral condemnation or as a precursor in principled dissent.

But that is precisely my point: While understandable, the search for inspiring moral paragons is not without theoretical and political drawbacks. Specifically, the fixation on Jewish values has led critics of sovereignty to neglect more fundamental questions about the grounds of the polity. Any serious bid to contest sovereignty's default status must defend the viability of alternative regimes. Klatzkin's work assumes renewed significance at the current juncture because he helps us grasp why ethical critics have trouble meeting this challenge. As a fierce critic of the moralizing tendencies of cultural Zionism, Klatzkin exposes liabilities of predicating political mobilization on adherence to abstract ideals, however morally attractive. Drawing on Klatzkin, I hope to persuade contemporary critics to investigate the historical conditions for and political viability of non-sovereign regimes. A historically informed critique of sovereignty is more powerful than an ethics of particular identity, I contend, precisely because it enables us to see that the critique of the state need not entail a parallel critique of the nation.

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6 Brief translations from Klatzkin's Zionist writings can be found in *Rebirth: A Book of Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. Ludwig Lewisohn (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935) and *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Herzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997). All translations from Hebrew are my own unless otherwise noted. When possible, I cite from the translations excerpted in Hertzberg's reader.

7 Arthur Hertzberg, "Jacob Klatzkin, 1882–1948", in *The Zionist Idea*, 314–316, at 315.

1 The Ethical Turn in the Contemporary Critique of Sovereignty

Before I turn to Klatzkin, I must elaborate the sense in which ethics has emerged as a signature discourse for negotiating contemporary transformations in the global order. In what follows, I juxtapose two examples of the ethical approach from which I dissent—Joan Cocks's *On Sovereignty and Other Political Delusions* and Judith Butler's *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*. Admittedly, Butler and Cocks pursue distinctive projects and draw on different archives. Butler seeks to mobilize "Jewish/not-Jewish" sources for opposition to Zionism, sources whose political purchase derives precisely from the challenge they pose to "sovereign notions of the subject and ontological claims of self-identity."[8] Cocks would expose the modern "idea of sovereign power" as an elusive dream that, when pursued, breeds violence and domination.[9] Cocks presents the Zionist movement, which she glosses as "the search for Jewish sovereign freedom," as one of two case studies illustrating sovereignty's "political psychology and logic" (the second being the colonization of North America).[10] Mindful of these differences, I do not mean to imply that Cocks and Butler pursue a joint project. The juxtaposition nevertheless proves fruitful as an illustration of theoretical currents prevailing on the academic left (especially in America). Beyond shared opposition to the State of Israel, Cocks and Butler share certain assumptions about what sovereignty means and why it is amenable to ethical critique.

Why do I characterize Cocks's and Butler's interventions as instances of ethical critique? What makes this critique ethical is less the sense of moral outrage at crimes perpetrated by the sovereign state—which crimes, Butler and Cocks imply, are not incidental—than the way in which theorists go about sundering received political attachments. Convinced that sovereign power is necessarily oppressive, Cocks and Butler undertake an investigation into the ethics of particular identity. The question that preoccupies Cocks and Butler is whether identity can be figured in ways that encourage ethical responsibility to the other. Thus, Butler and Cocks predicate the campaign against sovereignty upon a philosophical investigation of the self (both individual and collective). Given the myriad idioms available for the critique of sovereignty, why do Butler and Cocks invest political hopes in the ethics of particular identity? On my reading, the recourse to ethics reflects an understanding of sovereignty as something more than a regime type, something more than a legal

8 Butler, *Parting Ways*, 9–10.
9 Cocks, *On Sovereignty*, 4.
10 Cocks, *On Sovereignty*, 101, 107.

authority that is ultimate and absolute. Playing with the linkage between "the sovereign state" and "the sovereign self," Butler and Cocks treat sovereignty as an existential/psychological complex. According to Cocks, the sovereign state and the sovereign self express the same "conceit and ambition"—namely, the ambition to be completely self-determining.[11] Thus, the "target" of Cocks's critique "is not political societies on the scale of the large territorial modern state but the sovereign conceit and ambition of modern states large or small, as well as the same conceit and ambition on the part of the individual, the ethnos, the demos, and the human race as a single entity."[12] In short, instead of scrutinizing the nation-state's characteristic legal and political institutions, Cocks and Butler look behind the regime to criticize its animating ethos.

The fundamental assumption underlying the ethical turn is that only a certain kind of self—namely, a stereotypical sovereign self—would crave the ultimate and absolute power that sovereignty promises. As Cocks explains, "the search for sovereign freedom can be initiated only by a self that has already cut potential ties of identification with other entities in the world, or has had its ties cut by others, for it is only then that those other entities become alien beings over against which the self believes that its sovereign freedom must be fought and won."[13] Here, Cocks traces support for a specific political ideal back to a hermetic conception of subjectivity.

Butler also presumes that one's theory of selfhood determines whether one supports or opposes the current regime of Jewish sovereignty in Israel/Palestine. We can see as much if we examine a question that she formulates when glossing texts by Edward Said: "Is it precisely through a politics that *affirms* the irresolution of identity that binationalism becomes thinkable?"[14] With this formulation, Butler implies that adoption of a particular theory of identity—specifically, one in which identity can be attained "only with and through the other"—is a prerequisite for endorsing a concrete political program.[15] Conversely, those who purport to be discrete, autonomous subjects are dismissed as unlikely recruits to the binationalist cause. In short, Butler and Cocks trace support for the sovereign state back to a philosophically unsophisticated and morally reprehensible vision of the self.

Consequently, in this theoretical idiom, the self emerges as the proper target of critical intervention. Indeed, work on the self becomes a political

11 Cocks, *On Sovereignty*, 4.
12 Cocks, *On Sovereignty*, 4.
13 Cocks, *On Sovereignty*, 44.
14 Butler, *Parting Ways*, 31.
15 Butler, *Parting Ways*, 31.

imperative, an inextricable component of the campaign against sovereign power—for "only through this fissuring of who I am do I stand a chance of relating to another."[16] To enable us "to engage in a relationship without exerting sovereign power against one another," the critic must first loosen "rigid self-other antinomies."[17] If one accepts the diagnosis that the loss of "polymorphous perversity" through the consolidation of a more enclosed, less empathetic self encourages relations of domination, the key question becomes how to relax the self's boundaries.[18] At this juncture, ethics emerges as an indispensable resource. For diasporic Jewish ethics prove ideally suited to advance projects of "self-departure"—or so Butler contends.[19] On Butler's rendition, "ethics comes to signify the act by which place is established for those who are 'not me,' comporting me beyond a sovereign claim in the direction of a challenge to selfhood that I receive from elsewhere."[20] In sum, ethical critics presume that projects to reconfigure the polity must start with ethical work on the self. Thus, they devote more energy to envisioning "a relation to alterity which is irreversible and defining" than they do to mapping the contours of a non-sovereign polity.[21]

To say that Butler and Cocks scant institutional concerns is not to imply that they are indifferent to the state. Both thinkers are animated by the hope for the establishment of a regime which is more capacious than the nation-state. Yet they devote scant energy to concrete dilemmas of institutional design—or to elaborating theoretical justifications for, say, a regime that uncouples citizenship from territory. Such tasks do not command their attention, I would argue, because Butler and Cocks presume that readers who affirm the irresolution of identity are predisposed to embrace the 'correct' political positions. In the ethics of particular identity, determinate political consequences are expected to follow directly from ethical work on the self. Although Cocks and Butler advocate the establishment of a new polity, they focus their critical energies on getting the ethics right—and, here, correctness is judged philosophically—on the assumption that the desired political conclusions will follow.

But do determinate political positions follow from one's philosophy of subjectivity? Granted, ethical critics can enrich our understanding of political motivation—for individuals trapped in a narcissistic circuit of self-concern are unlikely to join campaigns for justice. Yet my aim is to convince readers

16 Butler, *Parting Ways*, 6.
17 Cocks, *On Sovereignty*, 126.
18 Cocks, *On Sovereignty*, 44.
19 Butler, *Parting Ways*, 5.
20 Butler, *Parting Ways*, 9.
21 Butler, *Parting Ways*, 5.

that the investment in ethics is nevertheless misplaced—for two reasons which I will state now without providing the necessary substantiation (given space constraints). Hopefully, the objections will gain force as I elucidate Klatzkin's critique (in the next section), and I will return to them in the chapter's conclusion.[22]

First: The ethics of particular identity does not provide sufficient resources for non-sovereign political thought, because philosophical conceptions of subjectivity do not yield determinate political stances. Were Jews to embrace alterity or adopt a "human-to-human frame," they would still need to initiate further conversations about the institutions, practices, and policies necessary to constitute a viable polity.[23] Ethics provides little guidance on such matters, precisely because the repudiation of sovereign subjectivity does not entail a determinate stance on, say, the merits of one-state, two-state, or federal solutions to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. To adjudicate between competing proposals, we need to exercise political imagination and historical judgment, weighing the ability of different regimes to fulfill the political aspirations of those who reside in the region.

Second: The ethical critique risks discrediting theoretical idioms that put the polity on center stage, because it shrouds the self in moral suspicion. Tracing the state's crimes back to a hermetic, even solipsistic, sense of self, ethical critics look askance at any political claim that presupposes a bounded self. Such claims arouse suspicion if one assumes, as Butler and Cocks do, that the pursuit of sovereign power is an inevitable temptation for every bounded self. Operating under these assumptions, justifying a federal regime (which accords local autonomy to distinct national groups) is liable to become incredibly fraught. Once we divorce the state from the self, however, the project of devising non-sovereign political arrangements becomes relatively straightforward. Indeed, a critic of sovereignty need not be a critic of the self or nation. The proper object of critique, I would argue, is not solidarity, belonging, or national identity, but the poverty of political imagination when it comes to envisioning political agency beyond the nation-state.

2 The Zionist Critique of Ethics

The limitations of the ethical critique of sovereignty are manifest when we situate the current debate within a broader historical perspective. In this spirit,

22 The following argument draws on Julie E. Cooper, "A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism: The Question of Jewish Political Agency," *Political Theory* 43, no. 1 (2015): 80–110.

23 Cocks, *On Sovereignty*, 127.

I turn to the Zionist essays of Klatzkin, collected in his 1925 volume, *Tehumim* (Boundaries).[24]

Klatzkin proves a key figure for the current conversation, I want to suggest, because his attack on the political salience of ethics emerges from *within* the universe of non-sovereign political thought. As we will see, the question that exercises Klatzkin surrounds the historical, religious, and legal conditions that enabled Jews to achieve autonomy in *galut*—that is, in the absence of territorial concentration, equal rights, or state power. Departing from Thomas Hobbes and Baruch de Spinoza (whose *Ethics* Klatzkin translated into Hebrew), Klatzkin does not hesitate to accord political standing to non-sovereign communities, such as the Jewish *kahal*—and he mines Jewish history for evidence of such a polity's inner workings. Klatzkin's investigation of the conditions that supported a diasporic polity is prompted by a diagnosis of the political crisis confronting modern Jews. In his Zionist essays, Klatzkin seeks to chart a trajectory for national independence now that emancipation and enlightenment have rendered pre-modern forms of Jewish politics—foremost among them the *kahal*—obsolete. In the course of substantiating this diagnosis, Klatzkin advances a theory regarding the political work that Jewish institutions, practices, and law once performed in diasporic communities. It is precisely this understanding of the enabling conditions for exilic self-rule, I contend, that leads Klatzkin to reject ethics as a valid basis for political mobilization.

A historical judgment regarding the dire consequences of the centralized modern state provides the catalyst for Klatzkin's political intervention. Specifically, Klatzkin identifies the loss of national autonomy—which he dates to the twin processes of enlightenment and emancipation—as the central crisis of Jewish modernity. On Klatzkin's narrative, the Jewish community was independent in the middle ages and in the early modern period, given limits to the state's reach and—more important from Klatzkin's perspective—given unwavering fealty to *halachah*. "We had our own court [*bet-din*], which even imposed fines and punishments, and it alone did we obey... We were subject to none but our rabbis and elders; the foreign authority's regime [*shilton*] did not have control over our land and our property."[25] Klatzkin is scarcely alone in identifying the loss of communal autonomy as the defining crisis of Jewish modernity. Klatzkin's work is nevertheless distinguished by the use of *galut* as the relevant concept for analyzing the political implications of these historical dislocations. The political crisis to which Zionism responds, Klatzkin suggests, is best understood as an epochal rupture within the *galut*. On this periodization, the *haskalah* provides the fault line separating robust forms of

24 Jakob Klatzkin, *Boundaries* [Hebrew] (Berlin: DWIR, 1925).

25 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 39.

galut from degenerate forms consigned to extinction. "It is impossible to draw any conclusions about the contemporary *galut* from the *galut* of the period prior to the *haskalah*. They are two different kinds of *galut*."[26] Klatzkin is convinced that the contemporary *galut* is untenable—and, as a result, he advises Jewish nationalists to focus their political energies on the land of Israel and the Hebrew language. Thus, it is scarcely surprising that peers lamented the 'extremism' of Klatzkin's position.[27] Yet contrary to what one might expect from a professed "negator of the exile," Klatzkin never dismisses *galut* as inherently oppressive. Departing from conventions of Zionist historiography, Klatzkin presents a strikingly sanguine, even romanticized view of Jewish independence prior to emancipation.

Adapting rabbinic concepts to illuminate contemporary political predicaments, Klatzkin frames his historical diagnosis as a lament for the *galut*, whose imminent demise he predicts. What does '*galut*' signify for Klatzkin and why is it unlikely to survive the trials of emancipation? Once barriers to social integration have fallen and religious norms have eroded, Klatzkin contends, Jews living outside of the land of Israel no longer inhabit a condition of *galut* (strictly speaking):

> Our sages spoke well: Even if the nations of the world are exiled, their exile [*galutan*] is not *galut*. But for Israel—who does not eat their bread or drink their wine—their exile [*galutam*] is *galut*.[28] And now that we do eat their bread and drink their wine—in the end, our *galut* will no longer be *galut*. That is, the end of our national foreignness which will decrease and come to an end.[29]

According to the rabbinic definition that Klatzkin adopts, expulsion from one's homeland does not in and of itself constitute *galut*. Rather, *galut* requires isolation from the dominant culture of one's adopted land—and it is assumed that *halachah* alone mandates the requisite insularity. Thus, in a period of widespread disregard for halachic prohibitions, the political situation of diasporic Jews is irrevocably altered, heralding the end of *galut*. In Klatzkin's view, the collapse of rabbinic authority and concomitant diminution of foreignness are not welcome developments but losses to be mourned. Amplifying

26 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 77.

27 See Hugo Bergmann, "On the Question of Jewish Nationalism" [Hebrew], *Miklat* 2, no 4 (1922): 14–26.

28 Midrash Rabbah Eichah 1:28.

29 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 54.

the rabbinic resonance of the argument, Klatzkin taxes the corrosive forces of enlightenment with "destruction"—the "destruction [*hurban*] of our religion, our temple [*bateinu*] in *galut*."[30] With the metaphor of *hurban*, Klatzkin suggests that the loss lamented is that of the institutions, such as the *kahal*, that ensured cultural distinctiveness and political independence in earlier periods. "The destruction [*hurban*] of our religion is the destruction of our state [*medinatinu*] in *galut*, the destruction of our third temple [*bateinu hashlishi*], our dwelling [*bateinu*] on foreign soil."[31] Here, Klatzkin equates diasporic religious institutions with the ancient Hebrew state, inverting the conventional understanding of *galut* as a condition of passivity and dependence, the antithesis of the independence enjoyed in biblical times. If Klatzkin doubts the wisdom of investing in diasporic politics post-*haskalah*, it is precisely because, on his diagnosis, historical developments preclude the existence of a 'state in *galut*.'

What is the political theory implicit in Klatzkin's lament for the demise of *galut*? As his terminological choices reveal, Klatzkin considers the *kahal*—which he repeatedly glosses as a 'state' [*medinah*] or 'kingdom' [*malchut*]—a legitimate polity. Thus, when explaining Judaism's persistence in the pre-modern *galut*, Klatzkin writes, "A fortified wall stood between us and them [non-Jews] and within the wall—a Hebrew state [*medinah*] in miniature (to cite Heine's incisive formulation)."[32] In other words, Klatzkin classifies diasporic Jewish communities as bona fide polities—as opposed to religious congregations—even though they remain subject to external jurisdiction. More than a literary flourish, Klatzkin's classification expresses a deeper theoretical conviction. Klatzkin dissents from the tradition of Hobbes and Spinoza, a tradition that reserves the title "commonwealth" for entities that wield sovereign—that is, ultimate and absolute—power. Refusing Hobbes' categorical distinction between a sovereign state and a disorganized 'multitude,' Klatzkin expands the universe of bona fide polities. According to Klatzkin, meaningful self-rule is possible even without the "Power Unlimited" that Hobbes equates with "absolute Sovereignty."[33]

Moreover, Klatzkin does not predicate political community on concentration within and control over territory. In the passage cited above, Hobbes discounts the possibility of a world government. Because peace requires subjection, the world must be carved up into territorially bounded states, each

30 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 77.
31 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 54.
32 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 49.
33 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 155.

answerable only to its own sovereign.[34] When Klatzkin extols the independence of exilic Jews, he severs legal jurisdiction from territory. Indeed, Klatzkin goes so far as to ascribe a shared constitution to Jews scattered across the globe. In the pre-modern *galut*, Klatzkin writes, "The communities [*kehillot*] of Israel did not only share one faith, they also shared one constitution [*hukah*], and we were subject only to our rabbis and our elders."[35] Granted, Klatzkin pins his hopes for the Jewish future on the land of Israel. Yet, as Klatzkin explains, territorial concentration only becomes necessary at a specific juncture, for contingent historical reasons. "As long as our lives were concentrated within our religious state [*medinateinu hadatit*], we did not know the danger of destruction, and the land of Israel was not a condition for the nation's existence. Since our state [*medinateinu*] on foreign soil was destroyed, however, the land of Israel has become a condition for our existence."[36] In principle, Klatzkin believes, one can establish a polity and preserve national identity without territorial concentration. For these reasons, Klatzkin is best understood as a theorist of non-sovereign, diasporic politics.

This classification is crucial for evaluating Klatzkin's critique of ethics, I submit, for it is precisely an appreciation for the political robustness of exilic Jewish communities that leads Klatzkin to doubt whether appeals to 'Jewish values' can advance Zionist political aims. The critique of ethics is a thread that runs throughout Klatzkin's oeuvre, from his early critique of his teacher, Hermann Cohen, to his polemical interventions in Zionist debate. In the latter texts, Klatzkin complains that luminaries of cultural Zionism have made the same mistake as Cohen (a non-Zionist)—both locate Judaism's defining traits in its moral doctrines. As early as 1931, Joseph Klausner summarized the "essence" of Klatzkin's political project as a "war against spiritual Zionism"—that is, a campaign against attempts to found Jewish nationalism upon "abstract ideas" and "beliefs and opinions."[37] As Klausner's précis suggests, Klatzkin's polemic does not map onto now-familiar oppositions between "political" and "cultural" Zionism. Rather, Klatzkin criticizes cultural Zionism from an avowedly rabbinic perspective, exposing its complicity with spiritualizing tendencies that became entrenched in emancipation's wake. Klausner identifies the following declaration from *Tehumim* as Klatzkin's political motto: "For this was Zionism created: To redeem the foundations of our being from the trial of spirituality

34 The argument here follows Julie E. Cooper, "The Land vs. the land," *AJS Perspectives* (Spring) (2014): 12–13.

35 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 49.

36 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 94.

37 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 154.

and abstraction and to elevate them into living foundations."[38] Klatzkin's critique of ethics is, first and foremost, a critique of attempts—by Ahad Ha'am and his disciples—to predicate Zionist politics on fealty to a set of abstract moral principles.

Conventionally hailed as the father of cultural Zionism, Ahad Ha'am (the pen name of Asher Ginsberg, 1856–1927) advocated the establishment of a spiritual center in the land of Israel, whose influence would radiate outward to regenerate Jewish culture worldwide. Klatzkin and Ahad Ha'am exhibit certain commonalities, but Klatzkin nevertheless objects to what he considers Ahad Ha'am's characteristic move—the "exaggerated interest," on the part of a professed nationalist, "in philosophizing about the essence of Judaism."[39] To Klatzkin's dismay, spiritual Zionism "attempts to define the Jewish national spirit in abstract terms, characterizing it as an ethical system and a unique *Weltanschaung*, expressed in such concepts as, for example, the ideal of social justice, the messianic idea, the concept of abstraction and the like."[40] Although undoubtedly polemical, Klatzkin's characterization of Ahad Ha'am's work is not without foundation. Ahad Ha'am does undertake a search for the national spirit, and he famously locates Judaism's essence in an exceptional moral genius. Ahad Ha'am hails the Jews as the people

> which, almost from the moment of its first appearance in the world's history, has existed only to protest vehemently and unceasingly on behalf of the rights of the spirit against those of the strong arm and the sword; which from time immemorial to the present day, has derived all its spiritual strength simply from its steadfast faith in its moral mission, in its obligation and its capacity to approach nearer than other nations to the ideal of moral perfection.[41]

Indeed, with a nod to Friedrich Nietzsche, Ahad Ha'am extols the Jews as the "Supernation"—the "single nation better adapted than other nations, by virtue of its inherent characteristics, to moral development, and ordering its whole life in accordance with a moral law which stands higher than the common type."[42] Yet Ahad Ha'am does not merely advance a controversial

38 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 136. See Joseph Klausner, *Philosophers and Thinkers: Essays and Research*, vol. 1 [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1934), 154.

39 Jacob Klatzkin, "Assimilation Is Possible," in *The Zionist Idea*, 320–321, at 320.

40 Klatzkin, "Assimilation Is Possible," 320.

41 Ahad Ha'am, *Selected Essays of Ahad Ha-'Am*, ed. Leon Simon (Cleveland: Meridian, 1962), 234.

42 Ahad Ha'am, *Selected Essays*, 228.

characterization of the essence of Judaism—he touts Jewish moral superiority to intervene in a controversy surrounding the proper aims of Zionist politics. Unlike "our latter-day Zionists, who base their Zionism on economic and political grounds," Ahad Ha'am insists that the pursuit of moral perfection can serve as a basis for national revival.[43] Without denying the importance of "political freedom," Ahad Ha'am treats the material "body" as a means to the achievement of spiritual ends—specifically, the revitalization of moral ideals that have ossified under the weight of halachic strictures.[44] In short, Ahad Ha'am does not merely caution against flagrant violation of moral norms—he contends that the pursuit of moral perfection can awaken the energies required to advance nationalist projects.

Against Ahad Ha'am, Klatzkin objects that the fixation upon moral development impedes the "renewal of Judaism on a national foundation"—and he advances his own, contrasting political program while elaborating this objection.[45] Klatzkin pursues the campaign against 'Judaism of the spirit' by opposing the evanescence of ideas, values, and sentiments to the constructive power of what he calls "forms [*tzurot*]." By "forms," Klatzkin intends "the barriers of the nation," the laws, material practices, and institutions "which define and establish national life."[46] Thus, Klatzkin's debate with Ahad Ha'am turns not on the respective merits of, say, compassion and ruthlessness, but on the ability of abstract ideas to ground political community. Klatzkin's central theoretical contention is that "the power of the shell is greater than that of the seed."[47] In other words, national independence can be maintained through reliance on "forms" alone:

> There can be no national base in an ethical doctrine, in ideas and concepts, in a *Weltanschauung*. National apartness is inherent in the many forms and prohibitions of our religion, not in the spirit of our ethics. Only our religion, and not the spirit of our ethic, can crystallize our national identity, because religion possesses binding power and authority. Unlike the abstract spirit of ethics, our religion is rich in forms which can fashion and protect a national life.[48]

43 Ahad Ha'am, *Selected Essays*, 232.
44 Ahad Ha'am, *Selected Essays*, 153.
45 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 16.
46 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 52–53.
47 Klatzkin, "Assimilation Is Possible," 321.
48 Klatzkin, "Assimilation Is Possible," 321.

To substantiate this assertion regarding the constitutive power of forms, Klatzkin adduces evidence from the pre-modern *galut*. "It is this power of our religion which impressed forms [*tzurot*] on the length and breadth of our lives… It is this power of our religion which even bequeathed us a kingdom [*malchut*] under conditions of subjugation."[49] Klatzkin's opposition to the cultural Zionist program is predicated upon a theory about the inner workings of a non-sovereign polity—specifically, that the forms of communal life secured Jewish independence in the absence of sovereign power or territorial contiguity. Klatzkin's critique of the ethical turn within Zionism is two-fold: He denies that moral principles can support a *national* community, given their universalism, and he denies that moral principles can ground a *living* community, given their abstraction. Klatzkin's resistance to reliance upon 'Jewish values' stems not from intoxication with brute force but from a theoretical conviction that forms alone can resuscitate national autonomy. Klatzkin's peers and interlocutors often complained that his work was marked by an empty formalism.[50] This complaint does not lack for justification—at times, the function of forms appears limited to the preservation of national difference, to apartness for its own sake. Yet contrary to critics' objections, Klatzkin's project is not altogether devoid of "a central normative meaning."[51] On Klatzkin's definition, a national community is a bounded community. In *galut*, "our Sabbaths and our holidays, our seasons of joy and sorrow, our statutes [*hukeinu*] and our laws [*mishpateinu*], our customs and our manners" set the "boundaries [*tehumim*]" of the Jewish community.[52] Yet the space thereby delineated was not merely one of Jewish difference, but an arena for meaningful self-rule. Detailing the political function of *halachah* in the premodern *galut*, Klatzkin stresses the breadth of the *bet-din*'s jurisdiction, which extended to the imposition of fines and punishments and enabled Jews to avoid non-Jewish courts [*archaot*]. In Klatzkin's romanticized portrait of 'ghetto' existence, *halachah* was the lone source of legitimate authority—the dictates of the gentile state were scorned as "evil decrees."[53] In this sense, Jewish communities were genuinely self-governing—"even in *galut* we lived a sovereign [*malchut*] life, a kingdom within a

49 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 50.

50 See Bergmann, "On the Question of Jewish Nationalism," 24, 25–26; Klausner, *Philosophers and Thinkers*, 156; and Martin Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 56–57.

51 Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples*, 57.

52 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 52.

53 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 49.

kingdom [*malchut betoch malchut*]."[54] For our purposes, the theoretical implications of Klatzkin's account are more important than their historical accuracy (or lack thereof). Against Ahad Ha'am, Klatzkin puts the practice of self-rule at the heart of Zionist politics. "We do not aspire to the land of Israel in order to realize the ideas of Judaism. For us, territorial redemption [*geulah artzit*] is an end unto itself: a life of national freedom [*herut*]."[55] Klaztkin presents a vision of political freedom which does not take the form of an aspiration to sovereign power—and he predicates freedom's achievement on laws, practices, and institutions, rather than ideas, values, or sentiments.

To distill Klatzkin's polemic to a concise motto: Prophetic ideals are no substitute for what has been lost, post-emancipation, nor can they help Jewish nationalists build a suitable replacement. Yet a clarification is in order regarding Klatzkin's stance toward morality. Although Klatzkin campaigns against those who place ethical refinement at the heart of Zionist politics, he does not dismiss moral considerations as irrelevant, nor does he justify wanton disregard for the plight of non-Jews. Thus, in an essay on the "Arab question," Klatzkin warns that Zionism would lose its "moral right" were its leaders to accept a hypothetical British grant of hegemony over the land of Israel.[56] Throughout the essay, Klatzkin attacks the hypocrisy of Zionists who demand national minority rights for European Jews, but appear willing to exploit British power at the Arabs' expense—which hypocrisy is liable to "destroy our moral stance."[57] Klatzkin recalls activists to a shared set of norms and expectations, and warns repeatedly against forms of "national zealotry" that contravene morality.[58] Thus, the critique of ethics does not absolve political activists from moral accountability.

Indeed, Klatzkin aims not to release political power from moral constraint; rather, he denies that abstract moral reasoning suffices to address concrete political predicaments. With this objection, Klatzkin positions himself as the heir to what he identifies as canonical traditions of Jewish moral legislation, from which Ahad Ha'am has (unwittingly?) deviated. In other words, Klatzkin campaigns against abstract ethics (which he dismisses as Christian) in the name of a more concrete moral practice (which he declares authentically Jewish). Although Klatzkin rails against the cultural Zionist obsession with isolating the spirit of Judaism, he often succumbs to a similar temptation to

54 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 49.
55 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 40.
56 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 149.
57 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 150.
58 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 151.

crystallize Judaism's essence—for example, when he proclaims Judaism's "signature" to be "the rule of law."[59] In passages such as these, Klatzkin advances a reductive mirror image of Ahad Ha'am's spiritual essentialism, depicting Judaism as wholly orthopractic. Judaism "is therefore not a belief but a religion [*dat*], that is, a constitution [*hukah*]. That is Judaism's praise and its power: the giving of laws and the severity of legalism."[60] Again, Klatzkin's depiction of Jewish orthopraxis is neither original nor especially sophisticated—but, for our purposes, it helps to clarify the nature of his objection. Klatzkin objects not to moral argument as such, but rather to the distillation of moral principles absent a legal/political framework.

> The essence of the law [*torah*] of Moses is perhaps not morality in and of itself, but morality in the sense of statute [*hok*] and law [*mishpat*]. Earlier moral doctrines [*torot*] were nothing but theories [*torot*], pleasant interpretations. In contrast, the law [*torah*] of Moses is not a theory [*torah*], in the sense of a setting forth of principles; rather it is a constitution [*hukah*] or a legal doctrine [*torat hukim*].[61]

On Klatzkin's interpretation, Judaism conveys moral instruction not through the dissemination of "moral and theoretical ideas" but through practices of commandment and obligation.[62] In rabbinic discourse, morality and politics are inextricably linked, in the sense that moral precepts do not exist independent of the legal framework of a discrete political community. Again, the point is not to assess the validity of Klatzkin's characterization, but to clarify the terms of his critique. As a critic of ethics, Klatzkin does not absolve political actors of moral responsibility. Rather, he questions whether the affirmation of Jewish values, in and of itself, can inspire the kind of agency required to found a vital political community.

3 Political Imagination Beyond the Nation-State

My animating concern in this chapter is that we lack the theoretical resources required to craft a compelling defense of non-sovereign regimes—at a

59 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 124.
60 Jakob Klatzkin, *Hermann Cohen: His Moral System and His Theory of Judaism* (Jerusalem: Hotzaat Mekor, 1971), 125.
61 Klatzkin, *Boundaries*, 180.
62 Klatzkin, *Hermann Cohen*, 124.

moment when such a defense is urgently needed, given the deepening crisis of the liberal order in the face of populist resurgence. To rectify this deficit, I have related a story about the debate among Zionist intellectuals surrounding the advisability of founding a political movement upon ethical principles. We may be able to learn more about non-sovereign politics from Zionist thinkers of the 1920s and 30s, I wager, than from contemporary theorists who protest the moral outrages committed by sovereign states. How can this historical excursus illuminate our current predicament, at a moment characterized by increasing doubts about Israel's future as a Jewish nation-state, on the one hand, and increasingly vocal assertions of sovereignty as a counter to forces of globalization, on the other?

As currently framed, the theoretical debate opposes ethics to sovereignty (and, by extension, the nation). Critics who would challenge the nation-state's hegemony are advised to study ethics, theorize subjectivity, and promote diasporic Jewish values. For scholars working in these idioms, ethical cultivation is a crucial component of the campaign against the current regime of Jewish sovereignty in Israel/Palestine, and against the pursuit of sovereign power more generally. Reading the work of Cocks and Butler, one is liable to conclude that only those invested in sovereignty and its privileges (both political and psychological) would resist this linkage of ethics and politics. With a more nuanced understanding of Jewish political history, however, we can see that this expectation is false. In the first half of the twentieth century, some of the sharpest critics of the ethical turn were students of non-sovereign politics. Again, the point is not merely to clarify the historical record, but to expose the political liabilities of forgetting that the controversy surrounding ethics was an intramural debate. For many on the left today, it seems obvious that support for the nation-state derives from a moral failing, and, consequently, should be criticized as such. The presumption that ethics is a privileged critical discourse is scarcely questioned. Yet, as Klatzkin illustrates, ethics is not the only language available to critics of sovereignty. Moreover, the critical tools that ethics provides are not sufficiently sharp—they fail to yield determinate political conclusions and they shroud the self in suspicion, making it difficult to justify any bounded polity (whether sovereign or not). In sum, our historical ignorance poses a political problem: Critics lack a forceful rejoinder to claims, now resurgent, that sovereign power is a necessary condition for security, agency, and self-determination.

Increased globalization notwithstanding, the sovereign state still reigns as the default mode of political organization—and its veneer of obviousness has only been strengthened by the prolonged border closures in the wake of Covid-19. Given these circumstances, the burden of justification rest with critics who propose that we entertain alternatives to the sovereign state. My hope is that

reading Klatzkin can help us to identify theoretical approaches better suited for evaluating whether regimes such as local autonomy can actually perform some of the crucial political functions that the sovereign state has arrogated to itself. For Klatzkin, non-sovereignty is not a mood, an idea, an ethos, or a philosophical vision of subjectivity. Rather, non-sovereignty is a concrete regime type. Exilic communities can exercise self-government, Klatzkin contends, under certain historical circumstances and given the right practices, laws, and institutions. On Klatzkin's framing, the pressing political question is not how to incorporate the other into the self, but how to reconstitute political community after the *kahal*'s demise. This question cannot be resolved solely through recourse to 'Jewish values,' nor can it be understood on the analogy of interpersonal relations between two individuals. Similarly, the political challenges confronting contemporary critics—whether grappling with the collapse of the Oslo peace process, the rise of ethno-national populisms, or defections from the European Union—are not helpfully understood through the prism of self/other relations. Supplementing the literature of ethical self-cultivation with a political-theoretical meditation on the inner workings of non-sovereign polities, I venture, may help critics sharpen their rejoinders to populist visions of national solidarity. To be clear: I am not calling for the adoption of Klatzkin's concrete political prescriptions, but rather for renewed attention to law, history, and institutional design.

The moment is ripe for such a reframing, precisely because it is no longer obvious that the nation-state constitutes the definitive solution to the Jewish question. The demise of the Oslo process has inspired a new round of proposals for federal, confederal, and binational solutions to the conflict—as well as increasingly vocal calls to implement what activists term "the vision of sovereignty" by annexing parts of the West Bank.[63] At the time of this writing, it appears unlikely that annexation will take place, despite the fact that the plan received the imprimatur of the Trump administration. Yet the very fact that the Trump administration's "vision" for peace legitimizes annexation and downplays nation-state sovereignty as traditionally understood attests to a fundamental reframing of political discourse surrounding the conflict.[64] At

63 For examples, see www.alandforall.org/english and http://womeningreen.org/sovereignty/ (accessed August 10, 2020).

64 The Trump administration's "vision" for peace—which essentially endorses the proposals of the Israeli center-right—pays lip service to the idea of a Palestinian state: "The notion that sovereignty is a static and consistently defined term has been an unnecessary stumbling block in past negotiations. Pragmatic and operational concerns that effect security and prosperity are what is most important." (*Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People*, 6: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Peace-to-Prosperity-0120.pdf [accessed August 10, 2020]).

this moment of peril and possibility, there is no shortage of maps, plans, or proposed solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nor have maps, plans, and proposals—including proposals for non-sovereign regimes—been in short supply throughout the history of Zionism. What is lacking is a rigorous theoretical examination of non-sovereign politics, a theory that would enable us to adjudicate between competing proposals. Again, the ethics of particular identity provides little guidance when evaluating the respective merits of, say, federal, confederal, and (one- or two-) state solutions. The differences between these regimes are not helpfully understood by analogy to contrasting conceptions of subjectivity, such that we could decide between them by assessing the philosophical coherence of their underlying ethical commitments.

Historical and political judgment are necessary to navigate what appears to be the moment of the nation-state's eclipse within Jewish politics. I have argued that extant ethical discourses make a negligible contribution to honing practical judgment. In conclusion, I want to raise the additional concern that these discourses' prestige may actually impede the development of the requisite theoretical idiom. Ethical critics exhibit a psychologizing tendency which subjects all borders, boundaries, and identities (whether individual or collective) to intense suspicion. Indeed, Butler and Cocks prioritize work on the self precisely because they fear that the bounded self invariably harbors impulses toward domination. Yet, as Cocks herself acknowledges, the desire for sovereign power does not stem solely from racism, xenophobia, or narcissism. The state's enduring appeal also derives from the security, self-determination, and freedom that it promises. It would be a grave mistake, both strategically and normatively, to abandon ideals of autonomy and self-rule. Indeed, the challenge confronting critics is to break the state's monopoly on such aspirations by demonstrating that they can also be achieved in non-sovereign regimes. Once we separate the state from the self, we can more readily address aspirations to autonomy and self-determination. To expand the possibilities for political organization beyond the sovereign state, we need to undertake a rigorous examination of the respective merits of sovereign and non-sovereign regimes as vehicles for self-determination. To repeat: The proper object of critique is not solidarity, belonging, or national identity, but the poverty of political imagination when it comes to envisioning political agency beyond the nation-state. My hope is that, having made Klatzkin's acquaintance, we can initiate a much-needed conversation about how to cultivate the requisite imagination.

CHAPTER 17

Confessing Christ in 'Christian Europe': The Death of the Church as a Theological Response to Populism

Joseph Sverker

Christianity's checkered relationship with politics and power in Europe has in no way become less problematic in the new millennium. Matteo Salvini, leader of the far-right party Lega in Italy, has a neopagan past, but now claims to be "more Catholic than the Pope."[1] Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary calls himself "defender of Christian Europe."[2] 'Christianity' and 'church' are, in other words, used to promote right-wing populist agendas. This is primarily done to demarcate and denigrate a cultural other, the Muslim, particularly in the wake of the 2015 increase of refugees at Europe's borders.

There is, however, a paradox in this development. While there is an increase among right-wing populist circles to identify with Christianity, church attendance in itself is an 'immunizing' factor against right-wing populism.[3] As will become clear, this is a complex issue, but in certain ways churchgoers are less prone to support right-wing populism than non-churchgoers. Yet, from the perspective of a cultural and national identity, Christianity can be seen to offer support to right-wing populist agendas, which has been called 'Christianism.'[4] If this paradox—support for right-wing populism through Christianism, on the one hand, and resistance to right-wing populism through church attendance, on the other hand—holds true, then the guiding question for me as a

1 Anna Momigliano, "Papa, Don't Preach," *Foreign Policy*, June 20, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/20/papa-dont-preach-italy-matteo-salvini-pope-francis-vatican-immigration-league-lega/ (accessed August 10, 2020).

2 "Hungary's Orbán vows defense of 'Christian' Europe," *Al Jazeera*, February 10, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/hungary-orban-vows-defence-christian-europe-190210195421238.html. (accessed August 10, 2020).

3 Pascal Siegers and Alexander Jedinger, "Religious Immunity to Populism: Christian Religiosity and Public Support for the Alternative for Germany," *German Politics* (January 31, 2020), DOI: 10.1080/09644008.2020.1723002.

4 For the concept of Christianism, see Rogers Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (2017): 1191–1226.

 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004498327_018

theologian is, what does it mean to confess Christ in Europe today when Christianity is used to alienate perceived Europeans from perceived non-Europeans?

Following Jan-Werner Müller,[5] I take the use of the idea of a uniform 'people,' pitted against another people, to be the core characteristic of populism. That 'other people' is portrayed as a danger to the uniformity of 'the people' which the right-wing populists claim to represent. Hence, there is a need to find a cultural and/or ethnic unifying factor that can define 'our people' against 'the other people.' A particular understanding of a 'Christian Europe' can play that role. In this chapter, I explore which theological and christological arguments might feed into this situation. Any answer to this question will have significant ramifications for the role of the church in European society. Importantly, theology is by no means a side-issue here. As Joshua Ralston points out, "[t]he social formation of communities and their conceptions of justice and equality are part and parcel of their 'religious' commitments."[6] He continues that, "[i]n point of fact, many of the arguments against accepting Muslim migrants into Europe … turn on central theological claims about Muslim views of God, the law, political authority, and tolerance."[7] Theology, then, plays a significant part and I hope that a constructive use of Christian theology can further immunize the churchgoer against right-wing populism, while staying true to its central confession.

While I will argue that there is a distinction to be made between Christianism, on the one hand and, Christian faith, on the other, this is not to say that right-wing movements have hijacked Christianity. On the contrary, the distinction is embedded in Christianity itself. Populism, then, highlights a central Christian distinction. This makes populism theological, as Ulrich Schmiedel argues in the Introduction to this volume.[8] And if both Christianism and Christian faith are traits within Christianity, it is worthwhile to explore the relationship between right-wing populism and the church both sociologically and theologically. As will become clear, the result of that combination will generate something of a paradox in the relation between right-wing populism and Christianity. Hence, there are many reasons for a theologian to engage constructively with the rise of right-wing populism.

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5 Jan Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (London: Penguin, 2017). For a discussion of definitions, including Müller's, see also Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

6 Joshua Ralston, "Bearing witness: Reframing Christian–Muslim encounter in light of the refugee crisis," *Theology Today* 74, no. 1 (2017): 22–35, at 30.

7 Ralston, "Bearing", at 30.

8 See Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism," in this volume.

1 The Immunization Effect

The immunization effect would not be as interesting if it was not for the paradox mentioned, that there is an increase in identification with Christianity among right-wing populists, while, at the same time, high church attendance has a negative correlation with adherence to these parties and groups. The immunization effect needs some clarification, however, since it is not evident in every survey on right-wing populist adherence.

Contrary to my claim above, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart write that religiosity is expected to "strengthen support for Authoritarian-Populist parties, which emphasize traditional morality, illustrated by the strong support of Evangelicals for Donald Trump."[9] Norris and Inglehart view the surge of populism as a "cultural backlash," where people that have been sidestepped by the liberalization of society, both culturally and economically, now react to this by supporting the movements they perceive as working against this unwanted development. Norris and Inglehart argue that there is what they call a "Silent Counter-revolution," a term they borrow from Piero Ignazi,[10] against the post-World War II development towards individual freedom with its emphasis on tolerance towards minority groups, different sexualities, and gender equality.[11] This counter-revolution, according to Norris and Inglehart, is largely a generational and educational issue. But religiosity as a factor belongs to the question of age. Since religiosity is rated as having greater significance for older generations, religion is positively correlated to the support of authoritarian populist parties. In terms of voting patterns, Norris and Inglehart conclude that, "voting for authoritarian parties is strongest among the older generation, men, the less educated, white European populations, in semi-rural areas, and among the most religious."[12] If Norris and Inglehart are correct, then this contradicts the 'immunization effect' of Christianity against right-wing leanings. Yet, studies conducted by Stefan Huber and Alexander Yendell, Pascal Siegers and Alexander Jedinger, and Tobias Cremer show a different picture.[13] However, as I

9 Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 271.

10 Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 366, n. 33.

11 Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 341.

12 Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 280.

13 Stefan Huber and Alexander Yendell, "Does Religiosity Matter? Explaining right-wing extremist attitudes and the vote for the Alternative for Germany (AfD)," *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 12, no.1 (2020): 63–82; Siegers and Jedinger, "Religious Immunity to Populism." See also Tobias Cremer, "Defenders of the faith: why right-wing populists are embracing religion," *New Statesman*, May 30, 2018, https://www.newstatesman.com/2018/05/defenders-faith-0 (accessed August 10, 2020).

will argue, their findings are not necessarily incompatible with Norris and Inglehart.

As Huber and Yendell point out, Theodor Adorno was in a sense aware of a paradox when he linked superstition with ethnocentricity in his work on authoritarianism. According to them, Adorno's work on "superstition and stereotypy" people's affiliation with the Christian faith can be developed into a three-pronged distinction.[14] First, people identify with Christianity because of the social status and sense of security that it might provide, but have no particular interest in the content. Second, there are those whose interest is in the content of the faith, what Huber and Yendell call "intrinsically religious Christians."[15] And third, some people believe in supernatural powers independent of the Christian faith. For Adorno, both the first and the third of these groups are prone to ethnocentricity, but not the second. Adorno's explanation for the lack of ethnocentricity amongst the 'intrinsically religious Christians' is that, as Huber and Yendell put it, "the Christian doctrine of universal love and the idea of 'Christian Humanitas' grants minorities the same rights as majorities," and, additionally, "the emphasis on 'spirit' tends to prohibit natural characteristics such as 'racial traits.'"[16]

Huber's and Yendell's sociological research confirms Adorno's theoretical work. Interestingly, economic factors and deprivation have different effects in the West Germany and East Germany. In East Germany deprivation has no significant effect on adherence to far-right views. Belief in the supernatural, however, does have an effect, both in the East and the West. Church attendance has a much greater effect in East German than West German constituencies. Huber and Yendell explain this with the likelihood of a lesser degree of nominal Christians and therefore a higher degree of "intrinsically religious Christians" in the East than in the West.[17] Huber and Yendell conclude that Adorno was correct with regards to both the positive and the negative correlation of church attendance with far-right views (the difference between Adorno's categories 1 and 2) as well as the positive correlation between his category 3 and right-wing populist adherence. The dual effect of church attendance can be explained, according to Huber and Yendell—and Adorno—by "the contradictory effect of formal and intrinsically motivated membership in Christian

14 Huber and Yendell, "Does Religiosity Matter?," 68. Huber and Yendell primarily refer to Theodor W. Adorno, *Studien zum autoritären Charakter* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999). I follow their use of Adorno on contemporary right-wing populism.

15 Huber and Yendell, "Does Religiosity Matter?," 68.

16 Huber and Yendell, "Does Religiosity Matter?," 68.

17 Huber and Yendell, "Does Religiosity Matter?," 73.

churches."[18] But what is true about right-wing views in Germany, is not true for voting behavior with regard to the right-wing populist party *Alternative für Deutschland*, 'Alternative for Germany (AfD),' according to Huber and Yendell. Gender is the strongest factor for voting on AfD. Church attendance has a significant effect in East Germany, but *against* voting for the AfD.[19]

Siegers and Jedinger in some ways contradict Norris and Inglehart as well as Huber and Yendell when they state that "[n]either church affiliation nor church attendance have significant direct effects on AfD vote intention,"[20] although they also found that "more conservative religious voters are less likely to vote for the AfD."[21] But, significantly, in Siegers' and Jedinger's findings, the effect of religiosity is *indirect* rather than *direct*. An important factor for the support of right-wing populism is, according to their results, xenophobia.[22] Contrary to some previous results, however, Siegers and Jedinger show that frequency in church attendance is linked with a lesser likelihood to hold anti-immigration attitudes. The 'immunization effect' is, therefore, indirect: "by reducing anti-immigrant resentments, church attendance also immunises against RWP [Right Wing Populist] support."[23]

Tobias Cremer's research is based on interviews with church leaders as well as leaders within right-wing movements, and finds similarly that anti-immigration is the core of the right-wing populist movements, but that, in his words, "the German churches came out strongly against them and their use of 'Christian' themes."[24] Churches and church leaders condemned hate speech, but perhaps more strongly, cathedral lights were turned off in the background of right-wing demonstrations. Hence, when Christian theological content is acted upon, then Christian religiosity works against right-wing populist xenophobia and at least indirectly immunizes 'intrinsically religious Christians' against supporting such groups and parties.

This more nuanced description of religiosity found in the studies mentioned above is largely absent in Norris and Inglehart. In Norris and Inglehart's survey, age is a much more important factor, particularly in their way of measuring religiosity.[25] It is significant, moreover, that in Norris' and Inglehart's analysis

18 Huber and Yendell, "Does Religiosity Matter?," 75.
19 Huber and Yendell, "Does Religiosity Matter?," 76.
20 Siegers and Jedinger, "Religious Immunity to Populism," 11–14.
21 Siegers and Jedinger, "Religious Immunity to Populism," 14.
22 Siegers and Jedinger, "Religious Immunity to Populism," 11.
23 Siegers and Jedinger, "Religious Immunity to Populism," 15.
24 Cremer, "Defenders of the faith."
25 Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 277. The importance of age is supported by Huber and Yendell, yet Siegers and Jedinger write that "[r]espondent age, living in East Germany,

'religion' and 'cultural values' are combined.[26] They link 'moral conservatism' and 'religiosity' which, in the more nuanced work of Huber and Yendell, would land in their first category of people who identify with Christianity for the sake of identity and the sense of security. But if Norris' and Inglehart's study is read to be about Christianism rather than an inner conviction to the Christian faith, then it supports rather than contradict the other studies. This helps to explain some of the differences in the findings between Norris and Inglehart and the others as to how religiosity relates to support of right-wing populism. That said, there is, as Cremer points out, an ambivalence as to how church leaders have responded to right-wing populist movements.[27]

2 Right-Wing Populism, Christianism, and the Muslim Other

As Cremer shows, there is a surge of references to Christianity within right-wing movements and it is largely used as a strategy to consolidate national identity. PEGIDA, which stands for *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*, 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of Europe,' in Germany marched with crosses and candles through Dresden.[28] As mentioned above, Salvini is increasingly appealing to Catholicism. Populist politicians such as Jimmy Åkesson in Sweden, Marine le Pen in France, and Viktor Orbán in Hungary are by no means identical, but all refer to 'church' or 'Christianity' as central for national identity.

Many more examples could be given, but it is important to note that while there is a great presence of Christian symbols and language in right-wing populist contexts, this has little or no impact on Christian faith amongst the followers. It is even the case that, as Cremer puts it, "in spite of the aggressive use of religious themes by far-right movements, polls show that their supporters are actually disproportionately irreligious."[29] What is invoked by the far right is an appeal to Christianity's cultural forming of identity. Christianity is in populist rhetoric a national identifier that defines one's country or Europe as a whole against other continents and cultures, and, significantly, other religions.

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and income, however, do not have a significant effect on preference for the AfD" (Siegers and Jedinger, "Religious Immunity to Populism," 15).

26 Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 363.

27 Cremer, "Defenders of the faith."

28 See again, Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism," in this volume.

29 Cremer, "Defenders of the faith."

There is, as Norris and Inglehart point out, a social conservative cultural backlash against a perceived unwanted change of society. But the blame for this change is most often laid on immigration. Anti-immigration attitudes feed many of the right-wing populist movements. But while many factors may enter into the identification of the 'other,' one clear 'other' is often assigned a religious identity. Right-wing populists overwhelmingly frame their xenophobia against a Muslim other.[30] As José Casanova argues, this assigning of a 'Muslim other' is not exclusively made by right-wing populists.[31] However, when Islamophobia is linked with the scapegoating of immigrants for complex cultural and economic changes, it becomes a particularly cogent brew.

The Islamophobic sentiment is at times so strong that it trumps more 'traditional' right-wing antipathy against the LGBTQ+-community and gender equality. In France, for example, Marine le Pen has promoted her party National Rally by protecting gay rights against a perceived Muslim threat.[32] And in Sweden, the Sweden Democrats in 2015 and 2016 planned a gay pride event in a Muslim-majority neighborhood.[33] That the Sweden Democrats direct LGBTQ+ and gender issues primarily against Muslims is evident in the way they frame their gender equality politics against honor crimes, circumcision, and genital mutilation.[34] There are difficulties with this 'protection of gay rights,' however,

30 See for example Gabriella Lazaridis and Vasiliki Tsagkroni, "Posing for Legitimacy? Identity and Praxis of Far-Right Populism in Greece," in *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and 'Othering,'* ed. Gabriella Lazaridis, Giovanna Campani, and Annie Benveniste (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 218–220; Birte Siim and Susi Meret, "Right-wing Populism in Denmark: People, Nation and Welfare in the Construction of the 'Other,'" in *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and 'Othering,'* ed. Gabriella Lazaridis, Giovanna Campani, and Annie Benveniste (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 124–126; and Ralston, "Bearing Witness."

31 José Casanova, "The politics of nativism: Islam in Europe, Catholicism in the United States," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 38, no. 4–5 (2012): 485–495, at 489.

32 James McAuley, "Marine Le Pen rarely mentions gender issues, unless she's talking about Muslims," *The Washington Post*, April 28, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/le-pen-rarely-mentions-gender-issues-unless-shes-talking-about-muslims/2017/04/27/2c9ab91c-1ef7-11e7-bb59-a74ccafid02f_story.html (accessed June 6, 2020); Andrea Carlo, "The far right paint Muslims as the enemy of the LGBT+ community – but they are the real danger," *The Independent*, March 30, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/far-right-lgbt-muslims-christchurch-shooter-salvini-le-pen-a8846031.html (accessed June 6, 2020).

33 Cecilia Vaccari, "Pride Järva: Sverigevänner får också fire Pride," *Göteborgs-Posten*, July 27, 2016, https://www.gp.se/nyheter/sverige/pride-j%C3%A4rva-sverigev%C3%A4nner-f%C3%A5r-ocks%C3%A5-fira-pride-1.3511418 (accessed June 6, 2020).

34 See "Jämställdhet och rättvisa/Våra förslag," https://sd.se/vad-vi-vill/jamstalldhetspolitik/ (accessed June 6, 2020).

since the majority of National Rally's supporters are socially conservative.[35] But what these two cases make clear is that Islamophobia is a main force in right-wing populist movements.

However, this is not exclusively the case. As is evident in almost all countries examined in *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and 'Othering'* antisemitism, homophobia, and racism are all significant to differentiate the 'other' from 'us.'[36] What the examination of the rise of the far right in Europe shows is that the particulars of the support for right-wing groups differ from country to country. As Gabriella Lazaridis and Vasiliki Tsagkroni put it regarding the British context, right-wing politics can still be said to have moved from a view of "biological inferiority to cultural racism, anti-immigrant racism and Islamophobia."[37]

If Islamophobia is a driving force for right-wing populist movements, then it is unsurprising that a commitment to church activities such as welcoming refugees into your home, or creating safe corridors for refugees to travel, as mentioned by Ralston, works to 'immunize' people against these movements. However, as Ralston as well as Cremer show, there is an ambivalence in the attitudes as well as the actions of churches concerning refugees.[38] The teachings about the love of neighbor and tolerance have an effect on churchgoers, but there are at the same time other responses too.

Zoltán Ádám and András Bozóki argue that the mainline churches in Hungary are playing a propaganda role for the regime and provide ideological resources that support right-wing populism.[39] Although their research confirms the irreligiosity of populist voters, Orbán has won over Christian voters by a "strategic alliance," as Ádám and Bozóki call it, with the

35 Annie Benveniste and Etienne Pingaud, "Far-Right Movements in France: The Principal Role of Front National and the Rise of Islamophobia," in *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and 'Othering,'* ed. Gabriella Lazaridis, Giovanna Campani, and Annie Benveniste (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 55–80, at 70.

36 See the contributions to *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and 'Othering.'* See also William Allchorn, "Beyond Islamophobia? The role of Englishness and English national identity within English Defence League discourse and politics," *National Identities* 21, no. 5 (2019): 527–539.

37 Gabriella Lazaridis and Vasiliki Tsagkroni, "Majority Identitarian Populism in Britain," in *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and 'Othering,'* ed. Gabriella Lazaridis, Giovanna Campani, and Annie Benveniste (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 239–272, at 255.

38 Ralston, "Bearing Witness" and Cremer, "Defenders of the faith".

39 Zoltán Ádám and András Bozóki, "State and Faith: Right-wing Populism and Nationalized Religion in Hungary," *Intersection: East European Journal of Society and Politics* 2, no. 1 (2016): 98–122, at 113.

Keresztényidemokrata Néppárt, the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP).[40] The two main Christian denominations, Catholic and Reformed, furthermore support Orbán's idea of Hungary as a sacred Christian entity. This pays out financially for them, since they now administer a growing share of services in education and care that are publicly financed. Ádám and Bozóki argue that this alignment of the mainline churches with Orbán's party Fidesz is largely against Christian values so that Orbán's appeal to Christianity can be seen as the creation of, in their words, a populist "surrogate religion."[41] Considering that this surrogate religion provides Orbán with a political authority independent of democratic institutions, what is created through the churches' support is also a surrogate type of democracy. This might create too much of a distinction between 'Christianism,' on the one hand, and 'Christian values,' on the other. In that way, Ádám's and Bozóki's study shows how churches align themselves with right-wing populism, but also stands as an example of scholarship where the issue is not engaged with theologically. Is it feasible to write off the two major church denominations in Hungary as "surrogate" Christianity?

In a less obvious way, according to Mattias Martinson, churches in Sweden align themselves with populist Islamophobia.[42] Churches are in danger of putting into effect a metalevel of anti-Islam populist rhetoric in their debates as Martinson sees it. He critically interprets a movement in 2016 called 'my cross' that started as a way for churches in Sweden to show solidarity with persecuted Christians. The emphasis was not solely on Christians in Arab countries, but some articles made vague connections between persecuted Christians, Muslims, the hijab, and the adhan. Martinson demonstrates how the debate about 'my cross' generated "an abstract distrust against Islam,"[43] by making insinuations that made "other religions" suspicious.[44] Martinson argues that these insinuations are rarely substantiated, but are kept deliberately vague. In this way 'my cross,' according to Martinson, plays into the hands of right-wing populism and also undermines a debate based on factual arguments.

As such, a type of surrogate democracy in the wake of church support of populism is obvious also in the Swedish case, even if that support is on a metalevel. But this raises serious questions about the church's relation to 'the other.' How is the church to relate to the other when right-wing populism increasingly

40 Ádám and Bozóki, "State and faith," 111.

41 Ádám and Bozóki, "State and faith," 113.

42 See Mattias Martinson, "Christianity, Populism, and the Role of the Theologian," in this volume.

43 Mattias Martinson, *Sekularism, populism, xenofobi: en essä om religionsdebatten* (Malmö: Eskaton, 2017), 58.

44 Martinson, *Sekularism*, 113.

defines that other through a religious epithet? This places the churches in a precarious dilemma. As Ralston phrases the question, "[H]ow can Christians be relevant to their Muslim neighbors without giving up their identity as followers of the crucified Lord?"[45] Ralston focuses on bearing witness to Muslims as Christians and uses Jürgen Moltmann's idea of the *kairos* moment for interreligious dialogue. I want to draw on Bonhoeffer to explore what implications the theology of the crucified Lord might have for a church in 'Christian Europe,' given both the heightened 'Christianist' rhetoric in right-wing populist circles, on the one hand, and the 'immunization effect,' on the other.

3 Bonhoeffer's "Christ for Us" and the Death of the Church

In my view, the polemical and nationalist heralding of a Christian identity and Christian Europe is problematic because it has incited violence against many people, such as immigrants, refugees, and established European citizens who are Jews, Muslims or LGBTQ+. The violence is probably the main problem, particularly for the victims, but I want to argue that the rhetorical juxtaposition of a 'Christian Europe' with a 'Muslim other' is also a problem for 'intrinsically religious Christians' who have no violent intentions whatsoever. As I have argued above, it is valid to make a distinction between Christianism and Christian faith, but in Europe that is a distinction *within* the churches. To write off 'Christianism' as a non-authentic or surrogate religion is to shy away from the theological challenge that the relationship between right-wing populism and Christianity poses. Right-wing populists' embrace of 'Christian Europe' should spur confessing Christians to think about what a confession in Christ means in Europe today where the church *is* a culturally and nationally institutionalized phenomenon.

Time and again, the debate about the churches' response to the right goes no further than to question immigration policies, but this is not the only question. For, confessing Christ in a 'Christian Europe' is itself complex because of the rise of Christian rhetoric by right-wing populists. If the label 'Christian' is used to exclude the other and incite violence, then 'confessing Christ' as one's savior cannot naively be thought of as an isolated issue. Is not the very act of confessing Christ problematic in a context where 'Christian Europe' is used as a means of excluding the other? And if so, what should the Christian, and perhaps even more difficult, what should the church do? How do you 'love your neighbor' if by the very name of Christ your neighbor is alienated from you?

45 Ralston, "Bearing witness," 27.

Today is, of course, different from the situation that Dietrich Bonhoeffer faced in the 1930s. One difference lies in the very confession of Christ. For when the German Christians, the church movement that strove to align the German Protestant Church with National Socialism, downplayed creeds and questions of doctrine,[46] confessing Christ as Lord became a basis for resistance against Nazism. Karl Barth famously objected against National Socialism by confessing Christ as the only Lord when the German Christian confessed the nation over Christ.[47] Bonhoeffer drew a more radical conclusion concerning the church of the German Christians based on the confession of Christ even earlier than Barth.[48] But can the same be done today?

In many ways, it seems unlikely that the same could be done today for in Barth's and Bonhoeffer's case, Christians argued *as* Christians in relation to other Christians who should at least nominally agree with Barth's and Bonhoeffer's confession. From that common identity, Bonhoeffer spelled out the implications concerning the other, the Jew in this case. However, the position of 'as Christian' is not problematized by, nor problematic in itself, for Bonhoeffer, at least not until his prison letters. Rather, as he writes in a text on hermeneutics, the problem lies in misinterpretations of the Word of God and that we do not let the substance of the Gospel "judge" our contemporary times.[49]

I am in many ways sympathetic to this view, for I see a potential for a critique of 'our times' from the viewpoint of the Gospel, but Victoria Barnett is still correct to warn us against making simplistic historical analogies between Bonhoeffer's time and our own.[50] That is no reason to take leave of Bonhoeffer though, but the road taken will not be to follow Bonhoeffer's direct advice to the church in Germany. Instead, there needs to be a detour through his christology before it is possible to work out any implications for the church in Europe today. For if the very act of confessing Christ itself is problematic today as a protest against right-wing populism (in contrast to Bonhoeffer's time), then

46 Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 44–51.

47 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 21.

48 Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 184.

49 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Contemporizing New Testament Texts," in *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 415–431, at 418–419.

50 Victoria Barnett, "Reading Bonhoeffer's 'After Ten Years' in Our Times," in *"After Ten Years": Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Our Times*, ed. Victoria Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 1–16.

christology might be the place to go. Here Bonhoeffer's guiding question was: who is Christ actually, or who is Christ, really, for us today?[51]

There are many places to put the emphasis in that short question. Who is Christ, *really*, for us today? Or, who is Christ, really, for us *today*? But in Bonhoeffer's lectures on christology, the primary emphasis is on the 'who' in the question. Christology goes back to *who* Christ was. It is a question of the person. The 'really' is of course also important. At least the Bonhoeffer of the 1930s thought that there is a "real Christ" as in "not a contemporized version" of Christ to be found in the Gospels.[52] In this way, Bonhoeffer criticized Adolf von Harnack's emphasis on the "brotherhood of man" as the essence of Christianity.[53] Bonhoeffer was also critical of Rudolf Bultmann's existentialist interpretation of the Gospel.[54]

For Bonhoeffer, both Harnack and Bultmann fall prey to an individualist assumption that only in a secondary move becomes an ethical concern for the other. Certainly, for Bonhoeffer, Christ is the center of existence *for me*.[55] But this *for me* cannot be seen as individualistic, rather it is *personal*. That is, it constitutes the *who* and not the *what*.[56] For Bonhoeffer, persons are always constituted in relations and as such dependent and vulnerable to the other as a fundamental condition. Bonhoeffer is critical of Bultmann and Harnack because for them one is first an authentic 'I' that then relates to the other. In contrast to this individualist view, Bonhoeffer develops a social account of the person which means that the "I," or "for me" can only be constituted in relation to the other, the "not me."[57] There is not an "I" to begin with that then interacts with the other. Christ was a fully human person in this socially constituted way for Bonhoeffer. Hence, Christ can only be Christ as *for me*. Christ is *for me* as or in his person—that Christ is for me is *who* Christ is.[58]

When Bonhoeffer discusses "religionlessness" in his letters from prison, he critiques Bultmann for not having gone "far enough" for, as Bonhoeffer sees it, he did not attack the individualistic metaphysical assumptions of religion.[59]

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51 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Letters and Papers from Prison," in *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 761–817, at 777.

52 Bonhoeffer, "Contemporizing New Testament Texts," 427.

53 Bonhoeffer, "Contemporizing New Testament Texts," 417–418.

54 Bonhoeffer, "Contemporizing New Testament Texts," 416.

55 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Lectures on Christology*, trans. Edwin Robertson (London: William Collins Sons & Co., 1966), 47–48.

56 Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, 44.

57 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "*Sanctorum Communio,*" in *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013b), 18–56, at 25.

58 Bonhoeffer, *Christology*.

59 Bonhoeffer, "Letters," 780–782.

For Bonhoeffer, Bultmann is still in an individualistic frame of mind in his proposals for authentic human life since Bultmann's authentic life is analogous to a salvation of the individual soul. For Bonhoeffer, this individualism is problematic because 'authenticity' becomes a goal "beyond this world" since one achieves authenticity not by the relations in the world, but rather prior to or at least detached from those relations.[60] That is, one misses something of the substance of the Christian faith if one is solely interested in the question of heavenly bliss, or, in Bultmann's case, an 'authentic existence' separated from everyday life. This has implications for what the church ought to be.

Here, interestingly, Bonhoeffer's emphatic 'for' returns again. While in his christology the emphasis is on Christ *for* me, in his ecclesiology the move is for the Christian "to be there *for* this world."[61] But this 'for' is not meant in an ethical sense, which Bonhoeffer judges as anthropocentric. Rather, as he writes, it is in the "biblical sense of the creation and the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."[62] In other words, to be 'for' another is not an ethical demand. Rather, the very being of a person is 'for' the other. In this sense, the church should be a witness to Christ's life, death, and resurrection *for* the world. Here, Bonhoeffer famously calls for a "religionless Christianity."[63]

The error for Bonhoeffer is that the religion of Christianity has either left the world "to its own devices" or forgotten the substance of the Gospel.[64] There is in both cases a failure to establish a connection between salvation, on the one hand, and creation, on the other. Overemphasizing individual salvation means that Christ does not become the savior of all of creation (against Col. 1:15–20).[65] But, if one overemphasizes a 'social Gospel' as in the 'brotherhood of man,' then one forgets that the church should bear witness to Christ, that the Son became flesh and lived among us. Bonhoeffer finishes his letter about religionlessness by stressing John 1:14, "and the Word became flesh and lived among us."

For Bonhoeffer, then, confessing Christ means to witness to Christ's life, death, and resurrection. But what does this mean if we also take seriously the question of the Christian to be *for* the world rather than concerned about one's individual salvation? The resurrection is sometimes treated offhandedly, but for Bonhoeffer, the resurrection is the sign that Jesus lived his life fully as God incarnate would. It was because it was Jesus hanging on the cross that the

60 Bonhoeffer, "Letters," 781.
61 Bonhoeffer, "Letters," 781.
62 Bonhoeffer, "Letters," 781.
63 Bonhoeffer, "Letters," 780.
64 Bonhoeffer, "Letters," 781.
65 Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, 65.

curse of the law did not bind him to death, but the Spirit of God could bring him back to life.[66] That is what Bonhoeffer meant with Christ being *for* me. Christ's love reached all the way to the cross *for me*.

If the church as witness means to witness the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, then it is to be *for* the world in the same manner as Christ is *for me*. In the most drastic sense, this would mean church accepting death *for* the sake of the world, 'the other.'[67] The idea of a national church that draws little or no distinction between church and society will in itself uphold a notion of a 'Christian society,' rather than witness to the substance of the Gospel. For Bonhoeffer a church that identifies itself with a particular national identity upholds an anthropocentric Gospel. The church will fail to be *for* the world in Bonhoeffer's christological sense. For Christians in 'Christian Europe' today it would mean serious re-evaluation of how they relate to the other.

In a context where 'the other' is predominantly identified as 'the Muslim' and in that way 'non-Christian,' Bonhoeffer's christological reflections seriously chastise the way Christians relate to the other *as a church* since any close identification with a people will endanger the church's ability to witness of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ *for* the world. From this perspective Christians in Europe will miss something vital in what 'confessing Christ' means, if they are not *for* the other in Bonhoeffer's christological sense. That christological 'for' is a bitter pill to swallow, for Christians must be willing to be *for* anyone, people both like and unlike themselves, in love. The danger is to be, like Christ, rejected by the other, or worse. But if confessing Christ means witnessing to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ *for* the world, Christians should not be concerned about what the consequences would be in being *for* 'the other' even to the point that the church ceases to exist. Being 'for' the other christologically means that the church can die.

Thus, to move from christology to the church, maybe we could be so bold as to say that the life of the church is God's concern and not the church's own concern. This means, just as with Christ, that if the church gives up her life for 'the other' it might please the Holy Spirit to resurrect it to a new life because the Christians were truly *for* the other (Rom. 5:6–11).

In conclusion, I have argued that there is both is an immunization effect against right-wing populism in church attendance as well as a problem in how easily Christianity in 'Christian Europe' can be aligned to right-wing populism. The danger is to regard the latter as 'non-authentic' Christianity or a 'hijacking' of Christianity by populism. Even though I argue that there is a distinction

66 Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, 109.
67 Bonhoeffer, "Letters," 797, 803.

to be made between different ways to identify with Christianity (along Adorno's categories), I want to stress that both the immunization effect as well as 'Christianism' are *Christian* concerns. One cannot be embraced by the church whilst the other is rejected. Confessing Christ in a 'Christian Europe' involves both the personal confession as well as the institutional and historical position of the church in Europe. If the Christian is to be 'for' the other in Bonhoeffer's christological sense, in reality, what this could mean for the church is to give up any and every privileged position in European society. Paradoxically, that demand for a death of the Church *for* the other looks more and more necessary the more the protection of a 'Christian Europe' is preached by right-wing populists. When the church of the 'Christian Europe' has died, alignments between Christianity and right-wing populists can be left in the ground with it. In no other way, as I see it, will the church be able to disassociate itself fully from right-wing populism. A religionless Christianity is the vaccine against right-wing populism; not a death of God, but a death of the church of 'Christian Europe,' a death that came about because Christians communally was *for* the world and thus witnessed what it means to be the body of Christ (1 Cor. 15).

But, should the church take the pill? The cure seems worse than the disease. One thing is true about right-wing rhetoric: it is almost impossible to imagine Europe without 'Christian' as one of its epithets. There have been definite benefits with the church's incorporation into European society. But if one wants to confess Christ in a still 'Christian Europe' one should be aware that that particular Christianity comes with an appendage, which today is Christianity with a nasty brown tail.

CHAPTER 18

The Other in the Ecclesial Self: The Church and the Populist Challenge

Sturla J. Stålsett

How can churches avoid being hijacked by populism? How can they protect themselves from being possessed by a populist spirit? The metaphors chosen in these questions, 'hijacked' and 'possessed,' suggest a problem when churches align themselves with populist politics.[1] Of course, definitions of populism vary considerably. And a simplistic anti-populism may serve as a justification for the paternalistic and denigrating rejection of legitimate protests, thus being itself, in essence, anti-democratic.[2] However, in its arguably most potent, ethno-nativist[3] version, populism today critically challenges churches globally. In Russia, Vladimir Putin counts on the Russian Orthodox Church's support when he introduces 'God' into the constitution, at the same time securing a de facto unlimited prolongation of his political power.[4] In the United States and Brazil, Presidents Donald J. Trump and Jair Mesias Bolsonaro have mobilized Evangelical Christians' support for their authoritarian and polarizing politics, through biblical references to chosenness and superiority.[5] Likewise, in Ger-

1 See Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume; Ulrich Schmiedel, "Hijacked or Hooked? Religion in Populist Politics in Germany," in *Is God a Populist? Christianity, Populism and the Future of Europe*, ed. Susan Kerr (Oslo: Skaperkraft/ Frekk forlag, 2019), 96–107; and *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy, (London: Hurst, 2016).

2 Thomas Frank, *The People, No: A Brief History of Anti-Populism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020).

3 By 'ethno-nativist,' I signal a reductionist logic that often equates 'the people' with a particular ethnic substance, "an 'ethno-nativist essence, one that is not only non-'migrant' and non-'Muslim,' but also 'native-born'" (Seongcheol Kim, "The Populism of The Alternative for Germany [AfD]: An Extended Essex School Perspective," *Palgrave Communications* 3, no. 1 [2017]: 1–11, at 7).

4 See "Russia's Putin wants traditional marriage and God in constitution," *BBC News*, March 3, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51719764 (accessed November 5, 2020).

5 See Fábio Falcão Oliveira, "Governo Bolsonaro e o apoio religiose come bandeira política," *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões* 13, no. 37 (2020): 137–160. For the significance of the Bible for populist politics, see Hannah Strømmen, "Sacred Scripts of Populism: Scripture Practices in the European Far Right," in this volume.

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many, France, the U.K., Poland, Hungary, and the Nordic region, right-wing, neo-nationalist populism presents itself as a temptation and a threat to Christian communities' integrity, as diverse leaders and movements make a claim to Christianity in their pursuit of power in the name of a people conceived to be pure, unique, and superior to others.[6]

This situation challenges ecclesiology as a committed reflection on the identity and mission of the church. Who are the 'we' that churches understand themselves to be, compared to the 'we' of such ethno-nativist populisms? How can churches resist the processes of 'othering' that populist identity politics both produce and prey on? Paul Ricoeur has shown that a constitutive presence of otherness in one's self has ethical as well as political consequences.[7] Drawing on Ricoeur, I will argue that confessing such constitutive otherness in the self is decisive for churches' self-understanding when confronting ethno-nativist populism. For this purpose, I will start by giving a brief account of the relational and political character of populism as well as religion, indicating how and why they are so easily connected. Distinguishing two competing versions of identity politics, as analyzed by Francis Fukuyama, will also play a role in my argument at this point. I then proceed to sketch a political ecclesiology, inspired by the basic structure in Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self, and the concept of the 'church of the poor' developed by Jon Sobrino in a Latin American context. Finally, two critical questions to this proposal need to be raised: Firstly, to what degree, and how, can it avoid mirroring the populist quest for purity and sameness that it is opposing? Secondly, will a church resisting the populist threat and temptation by seeing itself as constituted by the other also be a church open to populists?

1 The Constitutive Relations of Populism

Whether as a "thin-centered ideology" (Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser),[8] a discursive and stylistic repertoire (Rogers Brubaker),[9] or a counter-hegemonic, antagonistic logic (Ernesto Laclau),[10] populism is first

6 See also Hannah Strømmen and Ulrich Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity. Responding to the Far Right* (London: SCM Press, 2020).

7 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

8 Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

9 Rogers Brubaker, "Why Populism?," *Theory and Society* 46 (2017): 357–385

10 Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

and foremost a political category. It is about the distribution and exercise of power: the power of people and the power over people. It prioritizes specific ways of legitimating power, namely the power of expansion, oppression, and exclusion. In doing so, populisms raise the question of otherness. Who are the others? How should we relate to them? Othering, power-laden staging of a demonized 'them' against an idealized 'us,' is central to most populisms. As in Schmittian political theology, the concept of an enemy is constitutive for their practice.[11]

Populism is a relational category. Relations shape reality, positively as well as negatively. In particular, three constitutive relations seem to be central in populisms: first, the bond between a people and its leader; second, the asymmetric relationship between 'common' people and elites; and finally, an opposition between the native people and the non-native, foreign enemies of the people.[12]

The relation between a collective presented and understood as 'the people' and a unique and exclusive representative is essential. The representative is a charismatic leader, most often but not always male,[13] heading a movement or party. This relation is mutually constitutive: the people is understood as pure, homogenous, and exclusive through the leadership of its unique representative, while the leader draws his or her legitimacy from a claim to represent the people exclusively and directly. In his 'anatomy of populism,' the French political scientist Pierre Rosanvallon calls this the relationship between the "*peuple-un*" and "*l'homme-peuple*."[14] They are related through a particular modality of representation. Populists claim: "We, and only we, represent the people," notes Jan-Werner Müller.[15] Despite sometimes claiming to be more 'radically' democratic than established parties and politicians, populism's privileging of one particular people and its relation to a unique representative makes it anti-pluralist and thus anti-democratic, in Müller's judgment.[16]

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11 See Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism."

12 See Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); *Saving the People,* ed. Marzouki, McDonnell, and Roy; and Brubaker, "Why Populism?"

13 Women populist leaders, such as Eva Perón in Argentina, Ismelda Marcos in the Philippines, and Marie Le Pen in France, have often relied on close (family) relations to men in their access to power.

14 Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le siècle du populisme. Histoire, théorie, critique* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2020).

15 Müller, *What is Populism?*, 20.

16 See again Müller, *What is Populism?* Müller's influential account of populism has also been criticized. Thomas Frank charges anti-populism à la Müller for conjuring up a "democracy scare." Frank, *The People, No,* 3–5, 245–256.

The second constitutive relation is antagonistic. Populism sets the pure and homogenous people up against immoral, corrupt, and parasitic elites. It is anti-elitist. The elite may be national or transnational. Sometimes it is a combination, as in nationals residing abroad.[17] This contradiction is closely connected to a third hostile relation between the people and an outside group conceived as threatening its purity and true identity. This group is negatively defined as not-the-people or even its direct opposite.[18] It may be present within the national territory, or it may be pressuring against its borders. Typically, the outsider group is seen as inferior, impure, and hostile. It is an enemy, often also playing the role of a scapegoat: Jews, Roma, Rohingya, Muslims, migrants, or asylum seekers. It may also be those 'at the bottom' within the country, often construed as passive recipients of unjustified welfare benefits. Significantly, it is through the othering of this group that 'the people' gains its identity. In populism, the exclusion of the inferior other constitutes the superior self.

2 Identity Politics: Sameness or Selfhood – Supremacy or Equality?

The populist obsession with defining and defending the true people makes it a kind of identity politics. 'Identity' comes from the Latin word 'idem,' which means 'the same.' In other words, the identity question is, 'Who are we?', meaning, in Samuel Huntington's terms, 'Who is like us?'[19] It inevitably evokes the opposite question: 'Who is *not* like us?' Who are 'the others' who are different from 'us'? As we just saw, in populism, these others threaten the people's pure 'we' because they are different. Identity as 'idem' cultivates sameness and excludes difference.

However, 'identity' may not only refer back to 'idem,' but also to 'ipse,' meaning selfhood. This distinction between sameness and selfhood is central to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. He seeks to avoid the absolutization of the self as its own foundation, as in the cogito of René Descartes or the subject

17 For example, Viktor Orbán portrays the exiled billionaire George Soros as an enemy of the Hungarian people and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan blames the self-exiled imam Fethullah Gülen for the failed coup attempt of 2016.

18 Brubaker distinguishes between appeals to 'the people' that are vertical (against those on top or on the bottom) and horizontal (against outside forces or groups), see Brubaker, "Why Populism?"; Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism."

19 See Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), where he argues that the core identity of the United States is, and should be, "White, Anglosaxon and Protestant (WASP)" (Huntington, *Who Are We?*, xvii).

of Immanuel Kant. He also rejects the absolution of the self as merely deceptive performance or will to power, as in the anti-cogito of Friedrich Nietzsche.[20] Ricoeur speaks of "two sorts of identity, the immutable identity of the *idem*, and the changing identity of the *ipse*, the self, with its historical condition."[21] The distinction is closely related to his concept of narrative identity.[22] This distinction, I suggest, may also shed light on critical ecclesiological resources for resisting the threat and temptation of ethno-nativist populism. Seeing the other as constitutive of oneself can help churches and communities in resisting the rule of sameness.

In pursuing this possibility further, the distinction between two contradictory versions of identity politics is relevant. In *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition,* Francis Fukuyama refers to a concept discussed in Plato's *Republic*, namely "thymos," which is, according to him, the "part of the soul that craves recognition of dignity."[23] As the reflection on this concept develops, a distinction emerges that Fukuyama sees corresponding to two different versions of identity politics in our present time. On the one hand, there is an underlying desire, expressed as a political demand, to be regarded as of equal worth, "*iso*thymia."[24] On the other hand, there is the "*megalo*thymia," which expects to be regarded as better than other humans.[25] It expresses a claim to superiority. The first version corresponds, according to Fukuyama, to the struggles of different social, ethnic, or cultural groups for equality in rights and opportunities. Although justified, these struggles lead to fragmentation, in Fukuyama's account. They become difficult to harmonize or unify precisely because they represent diverse and even contradictory interests and aspirations. Furthermore, a focus on 'new,' often narrowly defined marginalized groups, Fukuyama claims, "diverts attention from older and larger groups whose serious problems have been ignored."[26] The White American working class, conventionally considered to be among Trump's most important constituencies, is a case in point. To Fukuyama, it is a problem that such groups,

20 See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 4–6.

21 Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 101.

22 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 140–168. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–1988).

23 Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (London: Macmillan, 2018), xiii, 17–24. Note the different subtitles in the first version of the book.

24 Fukuyama, *Identity*, 22.

25 Fukuyama, *Identity*, 21.

26 Fukuyama, *Identity*, 116.

seeing themselves ignored by the protagonists of the identity politics 'of the left,' are liable to become staunch supporters of an 'identity politics of the right.' The main ambition of this latter, 'forgotten majority' group, however, is not isothymia, the desire to be recognized as equal in dignity to the other, but megalothymia, the desire to be considered or to see oneself as better than others. Polarization, then, is the inevitable result.

Fukuyama's distinction is useful insofar as it shows that identity politics has different faces and goals, and that there are, indeed, legitimate reasons to struggle for recognition. However, it would be wrong to use it to blame both 'sides,' or 'types,' of identity politics for destructive polarization. Fukuyama seems to reject this.[27] However, in the end he seems to blame "the focus on newer and more narrowly defined marginalized groups"[28] for such extremist tendencies on the right. He sees "political correctness" as the "most significant problem,"[29] and even ends up paradoxically praising Trump as "the perfect practitioner of an ethics of authenticity."[30] However, this, to put it mildly, obvious sidetracking of the issue does not take away from what is helpful in distinguishing between megalothymic and isothymic identity politics. It is the megalothymic kind that fuels far-right supremacist discourses about nation, race, family—and religion.[31] It demands purity and sameness, 'idem,' rather than recognition for selfhood in difference and equality, 'ipse.'

White supremacy is but one of the ugly faces of megalothymic identity politics. Antisemitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and a more general xenophobia leading to draconian anti-immigration policies, are others. In June 2020, Andrzej Duda, an ally of the ruling ethno-nativist party 'Law and Justice,' *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS), was re-elected President of Poland for five years, after launching strong verbal attacks on the country's LGBT+ community and its struggle for equal rights, calling it an "ideology worse than communism."[32] Some towns in Poland have proclaimed themselves "LGBT-free zones."[33] These trends boost a renewed idealization of national customs, traditions,

27 "The blame for this polarization is not equally shared between left and right," he notes, because the Republican party has moved toward "extremist views" (Fukuyama, *Identity*, 117).

28 Fukuyama, *Identity*, 116.

29 Fukuyama, *Identity*, 118.

30 Fukuyama, *Identity*, 119.

31 See again Strømmen and Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity.*

32 See "Polish election: Andrezej Duda says LGBT 'ideology' worse than communism," *BBC News*, June 14, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53039864 (accessed November 5, 2020).

33 See Rick Noack, "Polish cities and provinces declare 'LGBT-free zones' as government ramps up 'hate speech,'" *The Independent*, July 22, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/poland-lgbt-free-zones-homophobia-hate-speech-law-justice-party-a9013551.html (accessed November 5, 2020).

values—and religious belonging. The role of Catholicism as an exclusionary identity marker in the Polish example is one among many that pinpoints how religion in general and a church in particular may become very convenient in ethno-nationalist, megalothymic power consolidation.[34] That is why a critical ecclesiology is needed.

3 Ecclesiology Meets Populism

The relational constitution of populism makes it highly potent in the religious sphere. Religiosity is fundamentally relational, too. One of the possible etymological roots of 'religion' is '*re-ligare*,' meaning 'to relate (back) to.' Religiosity expresses a longing for belonging, for relationship, and community with others. The imagined link in modernization theories between secularization and individualization could paradoxically lead to a certain neglect of a prominent feature of human life: sociality.[35] The helpful distinction made by Grace Davie between religion as 'belonging' and religion as 'believing' should not overshadow the connection between the two: people believe in order to belong; religion expresses itself in the believing in the belonging to a community. [36] Religiosity also expresses a longing for certainty, for purity, and for truth. It searches for the solid foundation behind or beyond an ambiguous, ever-changing, and even decaying experience of the world. Hence, there is in religion a quest for authentic community, the true people of faith. This is where ecclesiology meets populism.

While populism sets forth the idea of the true people, ecclesiology reflects on the authentic identity of the Christian community. In both contexts, the claim to truth legitimates the use of power to draw borders around the community: the line between insiders and outsiders, friends and foes, true believers and apostates. The dictum of the Church fathers *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* linked ecclesiology to soteriology.[37] Salvation could only be obtained through

34 For a nuanced analysis of the Polish example, including important counter-trends to the dominant nexus of Catholicism with ethno-nativist populism-nexus, see, Geneviève Zubrzycki, "Quo Vadis, Polonia? On Religious Loyalty, Exit, and Voice," *Social Compass* 67, no. 2 (2020): 267–281.

35 "Humans are tribal. We need to belong to groups," claims Amy Chua, *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 1.

36 Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

37 This axiom derives from the Bishop of Carthage, Cyprian, "salus extra ecclesiam non est" (Ep. 73, 21, 2).

belonging to the authentic community of faith, the church. Hence, the power to decide over this belonging was not merely a question of life and death. It was the power to decide over eternal salvation or damnation. Ecclesiology is traditionally one of the most controversial disciplines of systematic theology precisely because of this legitimization, or critique, of power. Where the true people and the true church coincide, the use of power may appear to be doubly justified. In a populist campaign for an idem-identity, expressing megalothymia, religion can serve as a protective shield of sameness against otherness. In return, the faith communities may get their share of privilege and power. This is why populist cooptation is both a threat and temptation for churches.

Consciously or not, ecclesiology is always politically relevant. Any normative proposition of what it means to be a Christian community can potentially impact political processes and power-brokering. Ecclesiology as the interpretative search for the ecclesial self can more precisely be defined as

> the task of critical-constructive analysis of issues and difficulties arising in the practice and self-understanding of the church, in order to diagnose the ills, identify possible ways forward, and so enhance the quality of the church's practice and self-understanding, for the dual sake of intra-ecclesial flourishing and extra-ecclesial witness and mission.[38]

Thus, ecclesiology engages in the internal identity politics of churches: Who are we, as a fellowship of believers, as a community of faith? How do we relate to others? What are the ills to be cured, and the possible ways forward to be chosen?

4 Exploring Otherness in the Ecclesial Self

In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur argues that self-understanding is a hermeneutical practice. As we seek to understand who we are, we must direct our attention to ourselves as if we were someone else.[39] The 'I' addresses, relates to, and interprets the 'me.' To Ricoeur, a person cannot understand herself without assuming another's position within her and acknowledging this presence of another in herself. In this process, there is a necessary step from idem- to ipse-identity, from sameness to selfhood. Understanding oneself as another is

38 Paul D. Murray, "Ecclesiology as Political Theology: On Delivering on a Transformative Strategic Orientation in Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 4 (2019): 822–844, at 824.

39 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. See also Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*.

not just comparison, that is, understanding oneself as if one were similar to another, Ricoeur emphasizes. One's own self cannot be imagined without otherness. Alterity co-constitutes the identity of the self.

Oneself as Another suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms. "To 'as' I should like to attach a strong meaning," explains Ricoeur, "not only that of comparison (oneself similar to another) but indeed that of an implication (oneself inasmuch as being other)."[40]

How can such a self-hermeneutical practice shape ecclesiology in an age of populism? Primarily by retrieving and envisioning the ways in which the church may see itself as another. There is a constitutional otherness in the church, I suggest, both in its origin and in its purpose.[41] From its very beginning, the church has understood itself as a body of another, the body of Christ, τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (Eph. 4:12). This could be seen as a *first* constitutive otherness in the church itself. The church's self, its being, rests in something outside of itself, which it does not own or control. In a traditional formulation, it is a *corpus mysticum*, the body of Christ in the world. This mysterious otherness marks a limit also for ecclesiology. The ecclesiological pursuit of the church's essence, the church itself, is always incomplete. The church receives itself, or its self, as a gift, as a mystery. The origin of the church is in another, in the other: God in Christ.

This body is, however, not merely something the church receives. It is also something to be constructed through works of service. It is the mission of the church "to equip his people [τῶν ἁγίων] for works of service [εἰς ἔργον διακονίας], so that the body of Christ may be built up [εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ]" (Eph. 4:12). Here, not only ecclesiology and soteriology come together; ecclesiology also shows its dependency on christology. Envisioning the identity of the church depends on the interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. The Christian community takes shape through a christo-praxis, a 'following of Jesus' in history. There is both receiving and giving in

40 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

41 Engaging in a creative discussion with William Cavanaugh, Ulrich Schmiedel argues for a "coalitional ecclesiology," which coincides with my main concern in this chapter. Drawing on Scandinavian Creation Theology, he argues, in Lutheran vocabulary, that "the self is *extra nos* rather than *intra nos*, de-centered rather than centred (*incurvatus in se*)." (Ulrich Schmiedel, "Coalition – Creation – Church: In Pursuit of a Political Ecclesiology," *Studia theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology* 73, no. 2 [2019]: 154–178, at 168). See also his *Elasticized Ecclesiology: The Concept of Community after Ernst Troeltsch* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

this identity-formation. In this dual movement of passivity and activity, the identity of the church is found in otherness, not sameness. Put differently; the ecclesial selfhood develops in openness towards and identification with another. It 'passes into another,' in Ricoeur's (Hegelian) formulation.

In Christ, then, the church is a church of and for others.[42] This is what we could call a *second* constitutive otherness in the identity of the church. The ecclesiology of 'the church of the poor' sheds light on this point. In Latin American liberation theology, the interconnection between the identity of Christ and the church is seen in a *particular* constitutive relatedness and mission: the option for the poor and their liberation. Practicing political theology as well as ecclesial service amid civil war and personal persecution in El Salvador, Jon Sobrino is known best for his radical christology.[43] Notably, however, his christology of liberation is closely linked to a specific understanding of the church's identity.[44] The true church is, according to Sobrino, the church of the poor. This church is not only a '*verdadera* iglesia' (real church); it has, more than any other form of being church, the historical traits of being '*la* verdadera iglesia' (*the* true church). It represents, as Sobrino provocatively puts it, the "resurrection of the true church."[45] Countering the critique of an 'elitist ecclesiology' (the church is first and foremost its hierarchy), *Lumen gentium* underscored that 'the people of God' is everyone. [46] This was to Sobrino a welcome "theological democratization of the church." [47] However, he still deemed such

42 The expression 'church for others' is of course associated with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, unabridged edition, trans. R. H. Fuller and I. Booth (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1963). For a more detailed discussion, see also Joseph Sverker, "Confessing Christ in 'Christian Europe': The Death of the Church as a Theological Response to Populism," in this volume.

43 See Jon Sobrino, *Jesucristo Liberador. Lectura histórica-teológica de Jesús de Nazaret* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991); Jon Sobrino, *La fe en Jesucristo. Ensayo desde las víctimas* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1999). If not stated otherwise, all translations from the Spanish are my own. However, I throughout, I point to the available English translations: Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator. A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. P. Burns and F. McDonagh (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993); Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Bruns (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001).

44 Jon Sobrino, *Resurrección de la verdadera Iglesia: Los pobres, lugar teológico de la eclesiología* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1986). English translation: Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987).

45 See the original book title in Spanish, *Resurrección de la verdadera Iglesia*.

46 Sobrino refers to *Lumen Gentium* 2, particularly n. 12, which states that "The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office," and refers repeatedly to the inclusiveness of the people of God as "[t]he entire body of the faithful," "the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith [...] from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful."

47 Sobrino, *Resurrección de la verdadera Iglesia*, 101.

an approach too general and universal. Seeing the church as the church of the poor, by contrast, makes room *especially* for the unexpected and often even unwelcome 'others' in the church —not just as guests, but as primary agents and hosts. In polarized times, he claims, the universality of the church as a community must pass through partisanship; it must commit to siding with excluded people and groups.

In his christology, Sobrino takes his contextual point of departure in a Latin-American *seguimiento* ("following") of the historical Jesus with the church of the poor as a *lugar teológico,* a prioritized hermeneutical context for theology.[48] He underlines the constitutive relatedness of Jesus of Nazareth as it can be found in the New Testament, when read through the lens of the contemporary Latin American experience of suffering and struggle. Like any human being, Jesus, as the true human being (*homo verus*), becomes who he is through the relations in which he is embedded: relations to God, to the salvific project of God which is the coming of the Kingdom, and to the poor, who are the primary addressees of the Kingdom.[49] Being the body of Christ in history, this particular relatedness to the poor also constitutes the identity of the church. Just as the historical Jesus, the crucified liberator, identifies himself with and welcomes the unwelcome others of his context and time—the poor, the sinners, the victims—the church consists of and is constituted by these particular 'crucified in history,' Sobrino claims.[50] They are "the deepest root of the church's being,"[51] and the contemporary actualization of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:27–28, about how God chose the "lowly," the "weak," and the "despised," in order to "shame the strong" and "nullify the things that are."[52]

The church, then, on this view, is a body of particular 'others,' the 'lowly,' 'weak,' and 'despised,' who are called to perform 'practice of service' (ἔργον διακονίας), or acts of mercy and liberation in their name. Reformulating this in the Ricoeurian framework, the church relates to itself *as* these others, the poor, who are present in and making present the radical other, Christ: "In the poor, Christ has made himself present in the church." [53]

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48 See Sobrino, *Jesucristo Liberador*, 51–72.

49 See Sobrino, *La fe en Jesucristo.*

50 See Ignacio Ellacuría, "El pueblo crucificado. Ensayo de soteriología histórica," in *Cruz y resurrección. Presencia y anuncio de una iglesia nueva*, ed. Hugo Assmann (México: CRT - Servir, 1978), 49–82; Jon Sobrino, "Los pueblos crucificados. Actual siervo sufriente de Yahve," *Concilium* 232 (1990): 497–508. See also Sturla J. Stålsett, *The Crucified and the crucified. A Study in the Liberation Christology of Jon Sobrino* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003).

51 Sobrino, *Resurrección de la verdadera Iglesia*, 100: "la raíz más profunda de su ser Iglesia."

52 Sobrino, *Resurrección de la verdadera Iglesia*, 99.

53 Sobrino, *Resurrección de la verdadera Iglesia*, 92: "En los pobres, Cristo se ha aparecido en la Iglesia."

5 A Church of Sameness?

Sobrino's ecclesiology of liberation (as well as that of his Brazilian colleague Leonardo Boff)[54] was sharply criticized. Both theologians had to face disciplinary reactions from Rome. Their ecclesiologies were deemed divisive. The 'church of the poor' was considered to be polarizing. In the way it was promoting the preferential option for the poor, it opted for one side in a societal struggle. In an "Explanatory Note" to the formal warning, *Notificatio*,[55] against Jon Sobrino's theology issued in March 2007, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith condemns any such partisan commitment of the church: "the Church cannot express this option by means of reductive sociological and ideological categories which would make this preference a partisan choice and a source of conflict."[56]

As it matured during the 1980s and 90s, there was also *internal* criticism of liberation theology. To some, the subject 'the poor' was seen as too homogenous in the formative phase of liberation theology. It did not, it was claimed, consider the diversity and plurality, the manifold otherness, of the 'poor,' such as women, indigenous people, youth, and LGBT+ persons.[57]

In some ways, these criticisms resemble accusations against populism: too narrow, polarizing by giving priority to one subject ('the poor,' 'the people'), and hence, excluding others. The proclamation of the 'true' church, and the poor as the 'true' people of God, could appear to mirror the populist claim to the purity of the people. And declaring the divine election of a community

54 See Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986); Kjell Nordstokke, *Council and Context in Leonardo Boff's Ecclesiology. The Rebirth of the Church among the Poor*, trans. Brian MacNeil (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996).

55 For the "Notification on the works of Father Jon Sobrino, SJ," see http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20061126_otification-sobrino_en.html (accessed November 5, 2020).

56 For the "Explanatory Note on the Notification on the works of Father Jon Sobrino, SJ," see http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20061126_nota-sobrino_en.html (accessed November 5, 2020). For the process against Sobrino, see the contributions to *Hope & Solidarity: Jon Sobrino's Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008) and the contributions to *Die Freiheit der Theologie. Die Debatte um die Notifikation gegen Jon Sobrino*, ed. Knut Wenzel (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 2008).

57 Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation. Praxis as Method in Latin American Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1997); Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Liberation Theology and Sexuality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Sturla J. Stålsett, "Liberation Theology," in *Key Theological Thinkers. From Modern to Postmodern*, ed. Ståle J. Kristiansen and Svein Rise (London: Ashgate, 2013), 617–630.

of 'weak' and 'despised,' in line with Paul in 1 Corinthians, could be seen as in tune with a populist discursive repertoire. So, would the 'church of the poor' become another version of an *idem*-identity, a church of sameness? Is its claim of a "resurrection" or a "genesis" of the *true* church a new expression of ecclesial hubris, of megalothyme?

To a certain extent, the demand for a diversification of the concept of 'poor' in liberation theology was justified, although it should be noted that an understanding of the diversity of the poor was present already at the outset of liberation theology. Gustavo Gutiérrez' held early on that in faithfulness to God in Christ, the church should be aware of itself and its mission from 'below,' not only from the perspective of 'the exploited classes,' but also the 'disparaged ethnic groups' and 'the marginalized cultures.'[58] These original impulses from theologies of liberation have later become fruitful in diverse contexts concerned with manifold struggles for equal dignity. In any case, these criticisms serve to underline that both the *partisan* commitment and the *diversification* of the ecclesial subject are particularly important in the context of ethno-nativist populism. The 'others' by whom the church is 'built' as the body of the wholly other, Christ, have many different faces. This is why the church's identity should be conceived of as an ipse-identity; ecclesial selfhood should be depicted as dependent on the inclusion of the excluded other. The distinctions between megalothyme and isothyme need to be taken into account. The church's constitutive inclusion of others would have to comprise people who do not commonly have a place within the sameness, the idem-identity, of populism. Likewise, it would have to express and demand the recognition of equality, not superiority.

While similarities between a populist discursive repertoire and theologies of liberation merit further scrutiny, the church's main challenge is not whether a particular practice is seen to be 'populist' or not. Rather, the critical test consists of whether Christian communities manage to preserve and promote the dignity of the excluded other. The supremacist, often racist, attitudes and actions of dominant populist identity politics have to be resisted by the church. A church constituted by others is called to side with precisely the kind of people who do not belong to the '*peuple-un*', the 'true people' of populisms: feared outsiders 'on the borders' or neglected or disregarded insiders 'on the bottom.' In other words, destitute and despised people such as,

58 "En estos años aparece cada vez más claro para muchos cristianos que la iglesia, si quiere ser fiel al Dios de Jesucristo, debe tomar conciencia de ella misma, desde abajo, desde los pobres de este mundo, las clases explotadas, las razas despreciadas, las culturas marginadas" (Gustavo Guriérrez, cited in Sobrino, *Resurrección*, 95).

in paradigmatic biblical terms, 'the fatherless and the widow' as well as 'the foreigner residing among you' (Deut. 10:18–19), hold a privileged position in such a church.

How can this be accomplished? An ipse-identity rests on the practice of narration, according to Ricoeur. The ecclesial community is nourished by narratives that present precisely an opening of identity as ipse-identity and not idem-identity: The Samaritan who showed mercy was a stranger made into a role model for the followers of Jesus himself (Lk. 10:25–37). The nameless woman in Mk 7:24–30, about whom we hear only that she was "Greek-speaking, of Syrian-Phoenician lineage," dared to break ethnic, gender, and religious barriers. She even challenged Jesus' messianic self-understanding when she astutely returned the words about the crumbs to the dogs back to Jesus himself.[59] Such narratives may help churches to avoid their reduction to more of the same or a self-sufficient fellowship. Suggestive and provocative rather than just referential, these biblical stories claim that there always will be new faces, new groups of others, that will stand before the church as "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine" (Mt. 25:40).

In seeing these particular 'others' as constitutive of their identity, the churches may find resources to resist ethno-populist exclusivism. Still, in doing so, they must strike a fine balance: The otherness must not be lost in the inclusion; alterity should be preserved even when being embraced. If diversity and plurality belong to the core of what it means to be 'ἐκκλησία', it underlines the uniqueness and irreplaceable dignity of each member of the church. The otherness in the ecclesial self can thus, perhaps, be transformed to 'eachotherness'.[60]

6 The Inclusion of the Populist Other?

I have argued that in facing the challenge of the populist demand for a religious legitimation of the purity of the people, the church should see itself as a community that comes into being through incorporating, without assimilating, the otherness of excluded others. However, do these others also comprise people and groups who support ethno-nativist populisms? We finally have to

59 See Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, *En territorio de Frontera* (San José: Departamento Ecumenico de Investigaciones, 2001).

60 In underlining this diversity-in-unity, concepts such as 'koinonia' or 'communio' have played a central role. See *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, ed. Thomas F. and Günther Gassmann Best (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994).

address the ecclesiological dilemma of how churches may critically respond to populist currents without excluding people who hold such views.[61] This ecclesial version of the "liberal dilemma"—whether or not it is a liberal obligation to be open to illiberal or anti-liberal movements[62]—is particularly challenging for a church that sees itself as co-constituted by the other.

The church's invitation should always be open, and, in this regard, non-partisan, at the same time as it must uncompromisingly side with the excluded and marginalized groups. This is, admittedly, not an easy task. However, it is not possible to uphold the principle of non-exclusion without rejecting exclusionary practices.[63] The one requirement in a consistently inclusive community is to be non-exclusive. Any person or group accepting the invitation to be part of such a community has to accept this premise. This is where one would have to ask whether populists find themselves at home in a church that is not exclusive to them? Would not the populist claim for the exclusive purity of the people imply the self-exclusion *in actu* from the body of Christ?

In the old ecclesiological discussion about the identification of the *muros ecclesiae*, the 'walls of the church,' one possible position is that the church's walls can only be built from the outside. In other words, self-exclusion would be the only ecclesial rejection. This can be seen as the reverse side of determining ecclesial selfhood as seeing and accepting oneself as another: In not wanting to include the other as part of who we are as a community, one chooses to set oneself apart from this community.

An ecclesiology of uncompromising inclusion is particularly relevant when populisms are more than eager to build walls around both churches and

61 See the debate on whether, how, or to which degree it is advisable to include ethno-nativist populists in the ordinary democratic process, to the point of engaging them in strategic alliances. In the Nordic region, different strategies have been chosen, from inclusion of the Norwegian Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*) in a broad government coalition, to the general denial of collaboration with the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*). See also Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism."

62 See Laurie L. Patton, *Who Owns Religion? Scholars and Their Publics in the Late Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 70, as discussed in Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism," in this volume.

63 See the discussions on what constitutes a *status confessionis*, the point at which it is necessary for the church to publicly break with certain regimes, communities or practices. The Seventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Budapest, for instance, decided to suspend two of its South African member churches because of their practices of racial separation. See Eckehart Lorenz, *The Debate on Status Confessionis: Studies in Christian Political Theology* (Geneva: Department of studies, Lutheran World Federation, 1983); Richardson Neville, "Apartheid, Heresy and the Church in South Africa," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, no. 1 (1986): 1–21.

nations. When the other is seen as constitutive of the ecclesial self, identifying the church as church demands openness to others, to the most radical degree: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." (Mt. 5:43–44).

CHAPTER 19

The Orthodox 'Unorthodox': From Populism to Pluralism

Ryszard Bobrowicz and Johanna Gustafsson Lundberg

"The populist right is forging an unholy alliance with religion"[1] announces a headline in *The Guardian*, followed by the lead, "From Salvini to Orbán, ethno-nationalists are hijacking religious themes to fuel their agenda. Progressives need to fight back."[2] In the article, Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins and Anton Jäger argue that religion and contemporary populism are strongly correlated, which has received too little attention from scholars. Steinmetz-Jenkins and Jäger rightly point to the link between religious themes and populism. It is hard to deny the presence of references to religion in the rhetoric of right-leaning populist politicians in Europe and the Americas. However, by setting religion over against secularism, and by speaking of a "religious backlash,"[3] Steinmetz-Jenkins and Jäger play into the hands of these politicians, because they legitimize the binary logic at the core of populism. Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser define populism "as 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."[4] This definition shows how populism thrives on clear divisions, creating two sides in a vicious competition with each other. Thus, pulling the rope in a different direction on a secular-religious binary is not a solution; it is part of the problem.

In this chapter, we argue that such divisionist thinking is one of the profound driving forces behind the growth of populism. Populism creates an overarching narrative, in which the secular and the religious are not only

1 Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins and Anton Jäger, "The populist right is forging an unholy alliance with religion," *The Guardian*, June 11, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/11/populists-right-unholy-alliance-religion (accessed August 1, 2020).

2 Steinmetz-Jenkins and Jäger, "The populist right."

3 Steinmetz-Jenkins and Jäger, "The populist right."

4 Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5–6. Ulrich Schmiedel's "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume, offers a thorough commentary on the meaning and methodology of defining populism.

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incompatible—they are mutually exclusive, and, because of that, outright hostile. Such division obscures the complexity of religious practices and prevents the development of other, more nuanced alternatives.

The chapter begins by discussing the emergence and significance of such a binary viewpoint in the political dimension. In this section, we discuss what role religious divisionism plays in the growth of populist movements. This confinement of religious views and practices is then exemplified by the debate around the Netflix's show *Unorthodox*, especially as it developed in the Swedish context. While the Swedish context has its specificity, we argue that the general patterns of binary thinking operating in the public sphere can be found elsewhere as well. Finally, by using the theory of radical plurality and Scandinavian Creation Theology we suggest that the tools for reframing the debate can be proposed from both the secular and the religious sides, and they are available both outside and within existing traditions.

1 The Emergence of Religious Divisionism as the Foundation for Populist Politics

In *The Road to Unfreedom,* Timothy Snyder outlined the emergence of new visions of politics in the latter half of the twentieth century. The changes, such as connection of modernity with progress, the success of capitalism over other economic models, and the development of the neoliberal logics in which every person and every organization is deemed responsible for its own success, created a sense of inevitability, which, translated into the language of power, constructed what Snyder calls "the politics of inevitability," the overarching political narrative that no ideas matter, there is just one deterministic path which the world has to follow, the way of economic progress.[5] By creating growing income inequalities and stifling social mobility, inevitability turned into eternity with the turn of the centuries—the growing notion that change is impossible, because things are just as they are, and there is nothing we can do about them. As Snyder writes, "[a]s distraction replaces concentration, the future dissolves in the frustrations of the present, and eternity becomes daily life. The oligarch crosses into real politics from a world of fiction, and governs by invoking myth and manufacturing crisis."[6]

5 Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

6 Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom*, 15–16.

Under the conditions of the politics of eternity, Snyder argues, there is no more room for improvement or reform. The only task for political leaders is to keep the nation safe from perils. To strengthen the sense of eternity, any notion of the future is drowned in the present by the constant conjuration of threats and crises, echoing Carl Schmitt's ideas about the sovereign ruler whose government affirms the state of exception as a principle, and emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between friend and foe.[7]

Applied to religion, the notion of the inevitable demise of religious practice was accompanied by different kinds of secularisms, political programs which posited what was labeled as the 'secular' against the 'religious,' and gave the clear primacy to the former. The turn of inevitability into eternity meant the reification of this approach and led to the widespread belief that the phenomena labeled as 'the religious' and 'the secular' were not only incompatible, but also mutually exclusive, the 'religious divisionism' that is at the core of our critique. While at the stage of inevitability the theories of secularization created a sense of triumphalism among the secularists, and a sense of threat among the religious confessions,[8] the turn to eternity meant that everyone began to feel threatened, laying foundations for the development of populism.[9]

The thin-centeredness of the populist movements allows them to define the community they claim to defend in different ways, and by that to operate on different sides of the binary depending on the actual needs. But the binary itself remains crucial, because it generates the sense of threat and enables the dynamic of friend and foe. Populism relies on the eternal character of the division to make any novel coalitions impossible, to justify their radical response, and to prevent a nuanced more complex understanding of the situation.

By, for example, employing religious imagery and embracing the 'Judeo-Christian' foundations, as Steinmetz-Jenkins and Jäger argue, it might be said that populism becomes linked with religion. But responding by taking a position in a binary contest just enforces populist thinking. First, it legitimizes the friend/foe dynamic and strengthens the pushback from both sides. Second, what could be portrayed as an authoritative and patronizing tone allows for classification of such critique as 'elitist.' Finally, it also limits the perspective to

7 See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

8 For the examples of the movements of both sides, such as the New Atheists or Evangelical Christians, see Tina Beattie, *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2007) and Elaine Graham, *Between the Rock and a Hard Place* (London: SCM Press, 2013).

9 The emergence of new religious movements and the pluralization of the religious landscape due to factors such as migration also seemed threatening to both secularists and some representatives of historically established religions.

the 'religious' aspects of populism alone. Instead, as we propose, a more adequate response would require to destabilize the binary view altogether, allowing for more complex and fluid positions to come about.

Until we move past the binary view of the secular and religious, populist movements will be able to thrive on that binary as a source of polarization. Unfortunately, religious divisionism is broadly present in the public sphere, permeating both popular culture and public debates. The recent debate around the Netflix series "Unorthodox" shows how a work of popular culture can reiterate the binary narratives. It also exemplifies the patterns of thinking that emerge in response to that. By focusing on how a debate on the series developed in Sweden, the next section will show how such binaries are tied to the long-standing patterns of thinking, and other binaries, such as that of individuals and communities, which, in more simplified forms, might lead to the growth of populism.

2 The *Unorthodox*: Between the Myth of Origins and the Defense of Liberalism

In spring 2020, the streaming platform Netflix premiered its new series *Unorthodox*, which follows the story of Esty, a young Jewish girl living in a Hasidic community in Williamsburg, New York. Esty gets married. From the beginning, it is quite clear that she feels uncomfortable in her role as a wife, which involves certain expectations from the Hasidic community. She flees to Berlin, where she becomes a part of a group of students at the music academy. The students represent the secular free world, which is characterized by an open attitude inclusive towards different life choices, sexualities, and ethnicities. Although clearly unsure and sometimes even uncomfortable with the norms of her new setting, Esty's journey from her religious background to a secular life in Berlin, in the end, is a story about the road from oppression to freedom, from antiquity to modernity, from all the aspects of life left behind by the modern world to an 'enlightened existence.'

The series quickly brought up a series of public commentaries, published by media outlets ranging from *The Guardian*[10] to *The American Interest.*[11] This

10 Brigid Delaney, "Unorthodox: a thrilling story of rebellion and freedom from New York to Berlin," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/apr/20/unorthodox-a-thrilling-story-of-rebellion-and-freedom-from-new-york-to-berlin (accessed August 1, 2020).

11 Sonya Michel, "The Roots (and Risks) of Netflix's Unorthodox," *The American Interest*, April 30, 2020, https://www.the-american-interest.com/2020/04/30/the-roots-and-risks-of-netflixs-unorthodox/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

included pieces from the acclaimed actress Jessica Chastain, known for her feminist advocacy, [12] to Robert Barron, auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles and the founder of the Catholic media organization "Word on Fire."[13]

Bishop Barron, while warmly recommending the series for its story and psychological subtlety, criticized it for the portrayal of modernity and religion. As he wrote:

> the makers of *Unorthodox* certainly intended this story to be a classic … coming-of-age story, but I also suspect they meant it to be something more—namely, a retelling of the great modern myth of origins. Especially for those who appreciate modernity as the definitive breakthrough in the history of Western culture, the modern emerged after a long twilight struggle with tradition, especially in its religious expression. This took the form of the breakthrough of the physical sciences and the breakthrough of individual freedom against, in both cases, the supposed opposition of the religious establishment. Once you understand these dynamics, you will commence to hear this story told over and over again in both the high culture and the popular culture—in books, essays, articles, films, and television programs. It is as though we have to be continually reminded of the enemy that modernity faced down in its emergence and against which it still struggles. What I find as a religious person is that this narrative, though constantly repeated, is tiresome and simplistic, and in fact does justice neither to religion nor the distinctive culture of modernity.[14]

Barron opposes the juxtaposition of religion and modernity, of which secularity is an essential part. By referring to the modern myth of origins, Barron follows William T. Cavanaugh's *The Myth of Religious Violence*. Cavanaugh argues that Western societies tend to create a legitimacy myth, in which religion is viewed as essentially prone to violence, and thereby problematic. Such a myth creates a justification for rejection of certain kinds of violence (based on religious beliefs), while condoning the others (in the name of the state). It also differentiates between the arbitrarily defined 'religion,' and other, 'secular' spheres of human activity, such as politics or economics, thereby creating a polarization,

12 Ramin Setoodeh, "Jessica Chastain Interviews 'Unorthodox' Breakout Shira Haas About Her Netflix Series," *Variety*, April 21, 2020. https://variety.com/2020/tv/news/jessica-chastain-shira-haas-interview-1234585631/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

13 Robert Barron, "Bishop Barron: Netflix's 'Unorthodox' and the modern myth of origins," *Aleteia*, May 28, 2020. https://aleteia.org/2020/05/28/bishop-barron-netflixs-unorthodox-and-the-modern-myth-of-origins/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

14 Barron, "Bishop Barron: Netflix's 'Unorthodox.'"

which, in Cavanaugh's view, is groundless.[15] Such critique highlights one side of the problem with religious divisionism. It points to the biases inherent in the broadly represented progressive viewpoint, in which religion is, by necessity, unmodern, introducing the binary of the religious and the secular. But, in response, there is a risk of replacing one divisionist belief with another. Such concern was pronounced in the Swedish context, where a debate was initiated by Joel Halldorf, a church historian and highly engaged Swedish public theologian who offered a critique of the series. Writing for *Expressen* Halldorf stated, in a similar manner to Barron, that the Unorthodox mirrors the secular gaze on religion. As he wrote, "The story about rebellion against oppressive norms is the Western myth of origin. We love it because in that story we are the heroes."[16] By presenting unconstrained individualism in heroic terms, as Halldorf argues, every member of society is ensured that her life has meaning.

According to Halldorf, *Unorthodox* is right in criticizing the oppression of women in closed communities, but to him, its main goal is to reconfirm the Western way of living. As he writes, "it whispers to us that the only alternative to our late-modern consumerism, however alien it may feel, is sectarianism."[17] At the same time, Halldorf does not necessarily argue against individualism. Rather, he views it as insufficient and contends that it needs to be complemented by the community since they offer a kind of formation that goes beyond that offered by national bureaucracy and legal authorities. In his view, the communities with destructive tendencies are black sheep, not representative of the communities as such, which supplement the ideals of individuality and freedom.

But even though Halldorf wants to offer an alternative to religious sectarianism, he still operates within the religious divisionist rationale. On the one hand, Halldorf distances himself from idealizing sectarianism. On the other, by putting late-modern consumerism in opposition to the community (supposedly Christian) he constructs another dichotomy, in which the secular world, with its late-modern capitalist habits, becomes the other.[18] Even if Hall-

15 William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence. Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

16 Joel Halldorf, "Därför är kärleken till 'Unorthodox' ett problem," *Expressen*, April 16, 2020, https://www.expressen.se/kultur/joel-halldorf/darfor-ar-karleken-till-unorthodox-ett-problem/ (accessed August 1, 2020. If not stated otherwise, all translations from the Swedish are our own.

17 Halldorf, "Därför är kärleken."

18 His argument is similar to Cavanaugh's. For a critique, see in Ulrich Schmiedel, "Coalition – Creation – Church. In Pursuit of a Political Ecclesiology," *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology* 73, no. 2 (2019): 154–178.

dorf offers an alternative view of religion as non-destructive or non-sectarian, he plays into the religious divisionist logic. Halldorf replaces one dichotomy (sectarian-individual) with another, the one between late-modern feel-good consumerism and some kind of a different, Christian (non-sectarian) life.

While Halldorf's critique ties into the international debates, it is offered in a specific, Swedish context. Because of that, the debate unfolding around his comments bears some specific features that require a short introduction. A common national narrative is about how Sweden during the twentieth century successfully built up a strong democratic welfare state, to which key concepts like rationality, reason, optimism, science, and social engineering were linked. It is partly against this historical background that the so-called 'faith and science' debate received such a great response. In June 1946, professor of practical philosophy, Ingemar Hedenius, published an article in one of the major morning papers where he critically discussed the problems of truth claims in the Christian religion and the problematic position of the church in (a rational) society. Hedenius concluded that, since religion rests on specific presuppositions (such as certain metaphysical postulations) that cannot be falsified nor verified, it cannot be classified as science, which implicitly meant that the subject did not belong at the university.[19] In the post-war climate, there was a strong skepticism against totalitarian ideologies. The concept of ideology began to be considered suspect and to some was intimately related to religion.[20] Hedenius strongly believed that value (ideological) conflicts could be solved by turning them into conflicts over facts.[21] The strong division between religious and secular, and private and public, was reinforced by the faith and science debate and resulted in theology becoming the other for many years to come. As Jayne Svenungsson states, the debate turned theology into a science of tragedy,[22] that is, the criticism directed at theology forced the subject into a defensive position, still possible to recognize in contemporary debates both inside and outside university politics.[23]

Even though the debate concerned religion and science, pointing to the academic subject of theology, it affected the view of religion and its position in

19 See Johan Lundborg, *När ateismen erövrade Sverige: Ingemar Hedenius och debatten kring tro och vetande* (Nora: Nya Doxa, 2002).

20 Jayne Svenungsson, "Teologi: en tragisk vetenskap," in *I Pallas Athenas huvud: Hundra år av humaniora*, ed. Henrik Rahm et al. (Lund: Makadam förlag, 2020), 229–235, at 231.

21 See Svante Nordin, *Ingemar Hedenius: En filosof och hans tid* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2004).

22 Svenungsson, "Teologi: en tragisk vetenskap," 231–232.

23 Svenungsson, "Teologi: en tragisk vetenskap," 232. However, the very same debate also generated self-critical reflections within theology, affecting its further development.

the wider society. The size of the debate is by some described as similar to that of #metoo, which underlines the broadness of the discussion. The secularization theories that would dominate the understanding of the role of religion for decades, as well as specific debates, such as the faith and science debate, have contributed to the strong valuation of science and expertise organized in different institutions in the Swedish welfare state.

In such a context, Halldorf's critique of the 'narrative of modernity' and defense of religious communities started a broader discussion. The first response was offered by the Swedish author and poet, Hanna Nordenhök. She introduced a more precise critique of the stereotypes depicted in both the Hasidic community and the secular students in Berlin. Writing in the same evening paper as Halldorf, Nordenhök compared *Unorthodox* with *Shtisel*, another Netflix series about the fictional Orthodox Jewish community, which discusses questions of religious extremism. Nordenhök found the latter to be much more nuanced. As she wrote:

> Also in Shtisel, there are depictions of community deprivation, doubts and severe struggles for independence. But the representations of the ultra-Orthodox context would not have such a strong effect, if they would not also acknowledge that it has at least capacity for living life among others, with worries among other worries, with advantages and disadvantages, with love as well as oppression.[24]

The quote blurs supposed boundaries between those within the community and those outside. It highlights the fact that there are problems and concerns shared by humans in a whole array of contexts. This idea of shared human concerns does not fit any divisionist worldview.

3 Communities, Individuals, and Liberal Society

Nordenhök's argument relates to another debate also connected to the religious-secular binary logic. In the argument made by Halldorf there is an underlying critique of liberal states claiming to offer the 'neutral' secular common sphere in which all particularities such as for example religious communities are welcome to take part. This self-imposed position fails, according

24 Hanna Nordenhök, "Problematisk bild av judiskt liv i 'Unorthodox,'" *Expressen*, April 22, 2020, https://www.expressen.se/kultur/hanna-nordenhok/problematisk-bild-av-judiskt-liv-i-unorthodox/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

to its critics, to recognize the particularity of the specific liberal view. There is no such thing as a neutral common space, they claim. Further, liberalism is founded on the idea that certain aspects of being human are universally shared, regardless of background or any particular context one comes from. Social liberalism emphasizes this idea even more. While we cannot go into this debate in this chapter, Nordenhök's analysis of *Shtisel* captures well the need for the deconstruction of dichotomies (and some forms of identity politics), and a possible alternative framing of religious practices beyond the divisionist logic, which takes into consideration the specific characteristics of a certain group while at the same time emphasizing and embracing human commonalities. While Halldorf keeps coming back to the division between religious and secular, although, in another framing, Nordenhök longs for complexity beyond obvious boundaries.

A similar analysis was offered by Dan Korn, a Jewish author and public intellectual. He claims that although there are aspects of Esty's life that are congruent with Deborah Feldman's own life,[25] they constitute just a fraction of the overall picture, and the rest of the story lacks credibility. As he writes:

> The lack of insight that a girl who grew up without parents may be in need of therapy and security instead of being thrown into a marriage at the age of seventeen is the great pain in "Unorthodox." It's Deborah Feldman's real fate, but the rest is a freely composed story, which unfortunately lacks credibility.[26]

Korn notes that so many aspects presented in the series would be more in accordance with 'Peter Pan' or 'Indiana Jones' than real life in the Hasidic community of Williamsburg. Korn continues:

> Life in Williamsburg does not have to be as rigid as in the film and temporary friendships are no guarantee of a happier life. The total freedom can also be the total loneliness while community means that one cares, which can also mean a form of coercion. There is no universal recipe for what is the right balance between these extremes.[27]

In a further debate, Halldorf was directly criticized for his communal preferences by both feminists and liberals. On April 21, Rebecca Selberg, gender

25 The biography on which *Unorthodox* is based.

26 Dan Korn, "Chassider förbereds för ett skönt sexualliv," *Expressen*, April 28, 2020, https://www.expressen.se/kultur/chassider-forbereds-for-ett-skont-sexualliv/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

27 Korn, "Chassider förbereds för."

studies scholar, expressed her frustration over Halldorf's neglect for women's positions in religious communities, their subordination and sexual oppression. She finds it deeply problematic that Halldorf dismisses *Unorthodox* as just another 'extinction narrative' about a young person's journey from a sectarian community to a liberated life. As she writes in response:

> *Unorthodox* … [and other similar series are,] of course, stories that show the ubiquitous tension between community and individuality. More than that, they are stories of women who resist—boring, the associate professor of church history seems to think, but hardly anything to underestimate.[28]

As she points out, even when stereotyped, oppression within religious practices must be recognized.

The philosopher Jesper Ahlin Marceta also defends the liberal values, writing that:

> We sympathize so deeply with Esty because we, like [John Stuart] Mill, are individualists. Therefore, we support her when she breaks free from the power of the community and when she seeks her way in life instead of playing the social role that society expects of her.[29]

Ahlin Marceta further refers to the cousin of Esty's husband, Moishe, both of whom go to Berlin to bring Esty back to the community. According to Ahlin Marceta, Moishe looks at everything from the perspective of the communities, as his foundational frame of reference. Thus, when looking at society, Moishe sees members, rather than individuals:

> He seeks a foothold and direction by fixing his eyes on different communities, not different individuals. Those who are not part of Moishe's own community have no value other than as markings on his inner map. Esty navigates life through other methods—she seeks and finds meaning in her own will.[30]

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28 Rebecca Selberg, "Varför blundar ni för sexualitetens makt?," *Expressen*, April 21, 2020, https://www.expressen.se/kultur/ide/varfor-blundar-ni-for-sexualitetens-makt/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

29 Jesper Ahlin Marceta, "Kollektivet kan vara ett fängelse utan murar," *Aftonbladet*, April 15, 2020, https://www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/a/e8LwrM/kollektivet-kan-vara-ett-fangelse-utan-murar (accessed August 1, 2020).

30 Marceta, "Kollektivet kan vara."

Charlotte Wiberg, feminist public intellectual, also comments on the tendency to divide between community and individual in this sharp way:

> Society and communities are thus difficult issues, but the only thing Halldorf does is to repeatedly put individualism/liberalism against an unspecified spiritual culture. In his totalizing view of cultural products in this society, he is strangely similar to Adorno or Althusser in their ideological criticism, while the spectator's thoughts and reflections are not taken into account. This is a narrow way of looking at cultural experiences that hold a holistic perspective of humans.[31]

In a second reply to Halldorf, Ahlin Marceta claims that many critics of liberalism are not able to provide a clear alternative. Rather, they tend to describe the role of liberalism as administrative, which he views as a mistake. As he writes: "Individualism is not just an administrative method. It is a way of life. I write in *Aftonbladet*: 'Unorthodox reminds us of a worldview we Swedes take for granted.' The series shows us what we are and have."[32] By viewing liberalism as primarily administrative, Halldorf sees it as drained of values and emptied of any meaning. Thus, while Halldorf, in principle, is willing to accept liberalism as the organizational framework for national authorities, he relegates to communities the formation of people with regards to their personhood, identity and ideas of the good life.

The historian Gustaf Johansson also rejects Halldorf's portrayal of the series. As he claims, *Unorthodox* is not about putting community and individual against each other. Instead, it is about individual freedom to choose how to live one's own life. As he writes:

> What we see, then, is not, as Halldorf wants to assert, a story in which community is opposed to individualism. Instead, it shows how an individual who is free to choose and therefore can also opt out, is the prerequisite for communities that liberate, rather than restrict and lock in. What exactly is the problem with paying homage to that message?[33]

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31 Charlotte Wiberg, "Nej, Unorthodox är inte 'hysteriskt' hyllad," *FLM*, April 20, 2020, http://flm.nu/2020/04/nej-unorthodox-ar-inte-hysteriskt-hyllad/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

32 Jesper Ahlin Marceta, "Unorthodox och individualism - ett svar till kritikerna," *Jahlin Marceta*, April 25, 2020, https://jahlinmarceta.com/2020/04/25/unorthodox-och-individualism-ett-svar-till-kritikerna/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

33 Gustaf Johansson, "'Unorthodox' hyllar den självvalda gemenskapen," *Expressen*, April 19, 2020, https://www.expressen.se/kultur/film--tv/unorthodox-hyllar-den-sjalvvalda-gemenskapen/ (accessed August 1, 2020).

The debate about *Unorthodox* shows how the more moderate versions of the religious divisionism viewpoint permeate the Swedish public debates. But while the examples we presented here are more local, with all of their specific characteristics, the patterns of thinking can be observed more broadly, as the quote from Bishop Barron at the beginning of this section hinted at. Interrelated with other conflicting values, such as individual and community or choice and tradition, they enforce the existing binaries. This hinders constructive approaches to diversity and pluralism and suppresses cohesion, creating favorable conditions for the populist alternatives. Further, it misses the characteristic that unites people over religious boarders—the longing for meaning. Nina Solomin, Jewish journalist and author, claims that even though the emancipatory theme is obvious in *Unorthodo*x, there is another possible interpretation; our interest for the Chassidic community could also reveal our desire for belonging, safety, family, and tradition. When writing her book *Ok, amen* Solomin dug deep into the Chassidic tradition and found many aspects that attracted a young seeking woman like herself.

> I think of the big families I met, the ones that worked well. The warmth of them and the obvious meaning of life. It was tempting for a 25-year-old who was looking for her identity. It made me, just like them, want to have ten children. Many religions and ideologies offer an existential and social answer to often very hard question about the meaning of life.[34]

Solomin concludes by stating that it is possible that the future also will comprise of an increased interest for living in tight communities offering clear and distinct answers. In the final part of this chapter, we will explore perspectives for going beyond such a dichotomous approach.

4 Shifting Perspectives from Diversity to Plurality

Peter Berger, once a proponent of the theory of secularization and its inevitability, corrected his remarks in the beginning of the twenty-first century. As he wrote, "[m]odernity is not necessarily secularizing; it is necessarily pluralizing."[35] This pluralizing tendency was described by Berger as having

34 Nina Solomin, "Därför vill vi se skildringar av chassider," *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 5, 2020, https://www.svd.se/darfor-vill-vi-se-skildringar-av-chassider (accessed August 1, 2020).

35 Peter L. Berger, "Secularisation Falsified," *First Things*, February 2008, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/02/secularization-falsified (accessed August 1, 2020).

a positive effect on the religious traditions, which, thanks to the coexistence of the secular discourse alongside the religious discourses, offer a shared set of vocabularies.[36] However, as exemplified by the abovementioned debates, such pluralization is constantly challenged in several ways. Translated into the political simplifications and used ideologically, such divisionism provides a slippery slope towards populism.

The most basic response in such a situation would be to underline the 'messiness' of society. Just as there is some truth in the myth of religious violence, there is some merit in the arguments against the liberal aggression towards religious communities. Just as one can find both wonderful and horrific examples of the communities' influence, one can pinpoint the huge benefits that liberalism brought and its negative side-effects. It is not an either/or. People are neither just members nor just individuals. They are neither just particular in their humanity nor just universal. They are both; their identities are overlapping.

The lack of such a complexification has been a subject of criticism in the educational sciences. In the field of religious education, the idea of an abstract individual subject was opposed for obscuring the concrete religious subject, whose experiences—lived religious life—is reduced to cognitive descriptions and knowledge. Scholars such as Lovisa Bergdahl offered the idea of different concrete living bodies as an alternative way of understanding the prerequisites of coexistence. The Habermasian deliberative model with its emphasis on rationality, consensus, and common humanity has been criticized for being blind to the conflicts and differences in viewpoints arising out of both the cultural differences and the uniqueness of individuals.[37] Criticizing democratic education in Swedish schools, Sharon Todd relates the democratic challenge to the concept of cultural diversity as something that needs to be handled away. In such an arrangement, the framework for solving the 'problems' with diversity is the creation of a non-conflictual democracy, which turns a person into an aggregate of her cultural attributes. The subject becomes a representative of general categories of cultures. As Todd writes:

> By this, I mean that although some lip service might be paid to "personal difference," the term nonetheless refers to an abstract individual that

36 Peter L. Berger, "The Good of Religious Pluralism," *First Things*, April 2016, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/04/the-good-of-religious-pluralism (accessed August 1, 2020). For a detailed discussion see Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

37 See Lovisa Bergdahl, *Seeing Otherwise: Renegotiating Religion and Democracy as Questions for Education* (Stockholm: Stockholms Universität, 2010).

> happens to embody recognizable cultural differences. So, while differences might be personal, they are in no way conceived as unique or particular. Thus, the individual becomes a generalized figure read through her attributes.[38]

This concept of diversity also encourages dialogue between groups. However, given the abstract idea of the individual reduced to generalized cultural marks, this dialogue ends up focusing on the possibility of communication over cultural borders. The dialogue between two unique individuals is lost, out of sight.[39]

This is why Todd suggests a change of perspective—from diversity to plurality and from dialogue to narrative—to open up the democratic conversations for antagonism to what she describes as "radical conception of plurality."[40] This shift to plurality requires a unique 'who,' emerging in the context of a narrative relation, that cannot be reduced to social categorizations, but that in itself is political. With references to Hanna Arendt and Adriana Cavarero, Todd explains how diversity gives attention to 'what' we represent, while plurality—a radical plurality—focuses on the 'who.' It is the narration of the who (rather than the dialogue between the 'whats') that, according to Todd, holds real political potential. Todd bases her analysis on the ontological assumptions made by Cavarero, who sees plurality as an inevitable aspect of one's being in the world with others. She does not define this plurality more substantially. The point is to underline the bare fact of plurality.

The key to achieving such a shift from 'what' to 'who' is in the encounter. People disclose themselves when encountering others. Following Arendt, Todd adds, it is "in the action of saying that one's presence makes itself felt, not in the actual words one speaks. So this is not a cognitive idea of people opening up in encountering each other. Instead, it is our material uniqueness as embodied, speaking subjects that constitutes the condition of plurality."[41] Such a relational space of disclosure becomes a political space. Thus, Todd advocates for the shift in thinking about democracy—from *demos*, which insists on a unified ideal for the people, to the *agonistic polis*, which thrives in confrontations.

The concept of radical plurality is useful in criticizing a generalized religious other. In the context of *Unorthodox*, it helps criticize the stereotyping of the orthodox community. However, unlike Halldorf's proposal, it does not replace

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38 Sharon Todd, "Educating Beyond Cultural Diversity: Redrawing the Boundaries of a Democratic Plurality," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 30 (2011): 101–111, at 103.

39 Todd, "Educating Beyond Cultural Diversity," 103.

40 Todd, "Educating Beyond Cultural Diversity," 101.

41 Todd, "Educating Beyond Cultural Diversity," 105.

one division with another. On the contrary, by thinking of public democratic space in terms of radical plurality one could depict Esty more as a complex individual in tension with her community. Such a dialectical tension between individual and community is very important to maintain. Otherwise, there is a risk of eliminating all kinds of structural critiques, such as that of feminist theology, which explored, in many configurations, how religious traditions nurtured oppressive, patriarchal structures. The combination of both kinds of criticism is necessary if we are to go beyond the religious/secular boundary. Otherwise, society will run the risk of maintaining differences in destructive ways, and as a consequence, drown in the swamp of extreme identity politics, which advocate group identity before coexistence.

5 Religion Beyond Binaries: A Dialectical-Theological Understanding

The roots of ideas such as the radical conception of plurality can also be found within existing traditions. In the Swedish context, philosopher Bengt Kristensson Uggla claims that the theology gathered under what he calls *Scandinavian Creation Theology* (SCT), dissolves clear boundaries between the religious and the secular.[42] Christianity does not have to identify itself in opposition to a secular worldview—rather, it can depict itself as standing in dialectical relation to the world, which makes the boundaries between the religious and the secular fluid. Re-contextualizing this Lutheran theological heritage, Kristensson Uggla recalls Gustaf Wingren, who, analyzing Irenaeus of Lyon's work, suggested that his theological thinking was strongly influenced by the context of a congregation he was leading. As Kristensson Uggla writes:

> This was a church that found itself in an extreme minority position, where Christians were being hounded and killed. Wingren used Irenaeus' situation as an argument that the doctrine of creation, conceived as an affirmation of God's universal presence in all creatures, should be considered as an appropriate theology also for a post-Constantinian era, where Christians have to co-exist with people of other faiths (or without faith) in a post-Christian society.[43]

42 This Lutheran theological thinking refers to Nordic theologians such as Knud E. Løgstrup and Regin Prenter (Denmark), and Gustaf Wingren (Sweden) highly active in the midst of the twentieth century. See the contributions to *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age: Løgstrup, Prenter, Wingren and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bengt Kristensson Uggla, and Trygve Wyller (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2017).

43 Bengt Kristensson Uggla, "Lutheran Theology as Affirmation of the Secular: Revisiting Gustaf Wingren in Dialog with American Theology," in: *American Perspectives meet*

According to Kristensson Uggla this creation-oriented Christianity is useful in coping with the religious/secular binary in our present post-secular age. The affirmation of the secular in Wingren's thinking is founded on an interpretation of our lives as parts of a shared world perceived as God's creation. The relationship to God is not restricted to religious experience and language, instead it is given in and with itself. "When the Bible speaks about God, it does not speak about a reality which man encounters in a specifically religious act and of which he has some knowledge […] God is creator, and his relation to man is given in the simple fact that man lives."[44] The point made by Kristensson Uggla is that processes of secularization and sacralization seem to appear at the same time in Lutheran Protestantism, which paves the way for the profane and the holy to co-exist. Thus, as Kristensson Uggla points out, secularization should not be considered a threat, but something that came from within the Christian faith. For Wingren the strong binary between the religious and the secular, as we conceive of it in today's debates, has its origins in and through the transition to modernity. In that sense Western secularity could be viewed as a religious phenomenon.[45]

6 Escaping the Secular/Religious Orthodoxy

There is, indeed, a link between religion and populism. But it is not, or at least not only, a religious backlash, as Steinmetz-Jenkins and Jäger proposed. Rather, it is in the idea that there are two opposing sides in society, formed out of loosely defined notions of 'the religious' and 'the secular,' which is what we defined in this chapter as religious divisionism. While the extreme religious divisionist stances, like those presented by populist politicians, receive a lot of attention, the more moderate, complex, and nuanced representations of this view tend to be overlooked. The debate around *Unorthodox* highlighted how such binaries tend to stifle the debate. On the one hand, religious divisionism hinders social cohesion and is inclined to disregard one part of the individual-community tension. On the other, it provides legitimacy to the more extreme versions of the view, proving that their postulates have a difference of degree, not kind.

This has been especially clear in the Swedish context. In this case, the binary between the religious and the secular is still influenced by the historical debate

Scandinavian Creation Theology, ed. Elisabeth Gerle and Michael Schelde (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2019), 37–49, at 39.

44 Kristensson Uggla, "Lutheran Theology," 43.

45 Kristensson Uggla, "Lutheran Theology," 45.

about faith and science. Thus, as we argued, there is a need to go beyond the existing binaries, between the religious and the secular, and between the community and the individual. Thus, on the political level, we proposed Sharon Todd's idea of radical pluralism which argues for a shift from viewing society through a prism of 'whats' to that of 'whos.' On a theological level we concluded by giving an example of an alternative way of theological reasoning which does not understand itself as the religious opposite of the secular. Rather, it identifies itself as standing in a dialectical relation to secular reasoning. The approach makes more fluid and unexpected ways of lived religion possible.

It is important to stop relying on group representation and tokenism, on the one hand, and the uncritical embracement of unconstrained individualism, on the other. Politics have to embrace both confrontation and encounter as necessary in building a stable, cohesive society. But the cohesion of society requires also, on the ontological level, to maintain a degree of universality, not to allow confrontations to fall into tribalism. Balance, not juxtaposition, of difference and universality, then, is where the next steps of such a political project lie. Populism by necessity relies on simplifications—thus, complex narratives take the ground from under it.

A metaphor for the dialectical perspectives proposed above is the duality in pictures used in Rorschach tests, for instance a picture where some see an old lady and others a young woman. The moment you realize this duality, there is no turning back to a one-sided view of the picture—rather when seeing one of the figures you at the same time recognize the multidimensional aspects of the picture.

CHAPTER 20

Conclusion: An Invitation to Comparative Political Theology

Joshua Ralston

European and North American politics and society over the last two decades have been haunted by the 'Muslim Question.' Anne Norton argues that, "The figure of the Muslim has become the axis where questions of political philosophy and political theology, politics, and ethics meet. Islam is marked as the preeminent danger to politics; to Christians, Jews, and secular humanists; to women, sex, and sexuality; to the values and institutions of the Enlightenment."[1] Norton's analysis is not about populism or political theology, but about the contradictions inherent in the construction of Western self-understandings. Nor is her work an attempt to shift attention away from the Jewish Question to the Muslim Question, or to pretend that the pressing problems of antisemitism within Christianity or European history have been solved. Instead, her book illustrates the multivalent ways that Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and political secularisms have been enacted, both in the past and in the present.

Throughout this volume, we have seen the ways that appeals to Judeo-Christian and secular values are intertwined in the rhetoric of far-right populists. These appeals often betray fundamental contradictions. Far-right populist parties seek to protect religious freedom in Europe and North America by denying religious freedom to Muslim citizens, and even some Jews. Moreover, the Judeo-Christian values of populism, as well as support for the modern-nation state of Israel, are oddly coupled with anti-Judaism. Here it is crucial to recall that the term Judeo-Christian, so ubiquitous in popular, academic, and populist discourse, is of a fairly recent vintage. The historian Richard Bulliet has shown how the term grew in popularity as a response to the persecution and genocide committed against Jews during World War II. "From the 1950s onward, with the reality of the Holocaust and the ghastly consequences of European anti-Semitism ever more apparent, the term 'Judeo-Christian civilization' steadily emerged from an obscure philosophical background—Nietzsche used 'Judeo-Christian' scornfully in *The Antichrist* to characterize society's failings—to become the perfect expression of a new feeling of inclusiveness

1 Anne Norton, *On the Muslim Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 2–3.

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towards Jews, and of a universal Christian repudiation of Nazi barbarism."[2] While Judeo-Christian was originally conceptualized as a way of accounting for violence against Jews, this volume has shown the ways that it is now evoked to protect idealized visions of the West and of the people, that often mask violence within liberal and Christian traditions.

This conclusion leaves the readers with two invitations to examine further the spirits of both political theology and populism. The first is to consider the ways that the anti-Muslim rhetoric of far-right populism in Europe and North America is intertwined within a longer history of Christianity and secularism. Solely disavowing far-right populists as antithetical to genuine liberal or Judeo-Christian values leads to evading a more serious analysis of the complications and contradictions latent within Western political theology. Moving beyond the volume's primary aim to study the spirit of populism in Europe and North America, the second invitation is to expand our analysis of both populisms and political theologies into a broader global perspective. To accomplish this, I suggest ways that political theology might borrow from comparative theology to engage in new readings of global populist movements such as Islamism.

1 Populism in the West

First, it is not only populist parties in Europe and North America that have viewed Muslims as a threat to the integrity of the people, nation, and culture. While Christian practice and some forms of the secular may confront one another and often clash—as in the anti-clericalism in some renderings of French political thought or the more ardent interpretations of Church-State separation in the Anglo-American world—their relationship is far more complex and even symbiotic. Part of this has to do with the ways that secularization often leaves in place many of the practices, rhythms, holidays, and assumptions of the religion that it seeks to distance itself from. As the Turkish sociologist and theorist Nilfüfer Göle points out, "Secularity has developed in a way that intertwines it with the particular religion from which it attempts to distance itself" such that "just as French laïcité holds a particular articulation with Christianity and represents a form of 'catho-laïcité,' Turkish laiklik also displays some characteristics of Islam. It pretends to be neutral, yet it tacitly endorses Sunni majority norms."[3] However, the relationship between Christian

2 Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 5–6.

3 Nilfür Göle, *Islam and Secularity: The Future of Europe's Public Sphere* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 4–5.

political theology and secular political practices exceeds Göle's description of cultural assumptions and religious distancing. In fact, as the contributions to this volume have shown, Christianity and the secular become intertwined in their relationship toward and distance from Islam. Christianity is commonly described, particularly when it is juxtaposed to Islam, as uniquely capable of undergoing secularization. As Ernst Kantorowicz argues, Christianity is in some ways the mother of the secular.[4] Accounts like his are evidenced in the scholarship of figures such as Charles Taylor, John Witte, and Michael Gillespie, who note in differing ways how Christian theology and practice has come to shape the secular age.[5] The academic understandings of the particularity of Christianity's relationship to secularism and religious freedom, coming not from populists, but scholars of secularism and religion, are not completely removed from the ways that Judeo-Christianity is deployed in populist rhetoric. As we have seen throughout this volume, populists in Europe and North America—even those that are not themselves members of religious communities—often champion the unique ways that Judeo-Christian values nurture tolerance, freedom, and human rights.

A case in point is how the history of Christian polemics against Muslims and the memories of historically fraught encounters have been regular features in nationalist anti-Muslim and populist anti-migrant rhetoric in Europe and North America. One of the most obvious cases, also covered in this volume, is Victor Orbán's appeal to the Christian and secular heritage of Europe and his call for Hungary to once again be a bulwark against the threat of Muslim migrants whose practices, laws, and theologies make them incapable of abiding within Europe. The history of Hungary's central, albeit often overlooked, role in stopping the Ottoman advance on Vienna is recast and reimagined as justification for nationalist policies that demonize migrants and Muslims. Just as Hungary had once saved Europe, Hungary is once again called to save Europe. The seemingly obvious distinction between attacking Ottoman armies and refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants fleeing wars in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan are blurred by appeals to both Christian-secular exceptionalism and the rhetorical power of an imagined history in which Christian-Muslim encounters are exclusively antagonistic.

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4 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016)

5 See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

The intertwining of the history of Christian-Muslim encounters with conceptualizations of a Christian-secular West is not limited to Orbán, but has proved to resonate more widely across Europe and the United States. François Fillon, Theresa May, and Donald Trump—as well as numerous far right-nationalist party leaders—have made appeals to the intertwining of secularism and Christianity to justify closed borders during their meagre response to the Syrian refugee crisis. As Anouar Majid laments in 2009 how, "No one seems to be reading the intense debate over immigration and minorities who resist assimilation as the continuation of a much older conflict, the one pitting Christendom against the world of Islam."[6] Work in the last decade on political theology and migration, including numerous chapters in the volume, have responded well to Majid's invitation. Longstanding rhetoric and polemics, rooted in Christian and secular political discourse, that envisions Muslims as fundamentally political distinct from the 'West' coalesce with historical memories and myths about Christian-Muslim rivalry. In this context, for instance, Martin Luther's 1529 tract on War with the Turks becomes not only a theological text on just war, religious rivalry, and the Reformation, but is recast as a clarion call to defend Christendom (often at odds with the text's own condemnation of explicitly Christian calls for war). Attending more closely to this history, and the texts and tropes that continue to fuel polemics, might offer new approaches to conceptualize the secular and draw inter-religious studies into interdisciplinary conversations on the secular and religious pluralism.

For as Joseph A. Massad has recently argued, Islam is central to the ideology, identity, and historical construction of Western liberalism. "Liberalism as the antithesis of Islam has become one of the key components of the very discourse through which Europe as a modern identity was conjured up."[7] In this work, as well as the work of others, such as Talal Asad, Gil Andijar, and Mayanthi Fernando, scholars have argued that European liberalism, as well as modern Christian political theology, has partly been created through the process of expelling (in the case of Andalusia), resisting (in the Case of the Ottoman Empire), or othering (in the case of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa) Islam and thereby Muslims.[8] That is to say, the very notion

6 Anouar Majid, *We Are All Moors: Ending Centuries of Crusades Against Muslims and Other Minorities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 3–4.

7 Joseph A. Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 11.

8 See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), and Mayanthi Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

of Europe and the West—and its appeals to liberalism and human rights—are partly developed in direct contrast to a perceived illiberal enemy neighbor. As Asad notes, "Europe (and the nation-states of which it is constituted) is ideologically constructed in such a way that Muslim immigrants cannot be satisfactorily represented in it."[9]

If these scholars are correct in their assessment, then the study of the political theology of populism is also a study of the various political theologies of Western liberalisms. We need not follow these critical theorists fully in their critiques of political liberalism or secularism to see the genuine insights that they offer into how Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are intertwined in the liberal paradox that Ulrich Schmiedel characterized in the introduction to this volume.[10] To only disavow far-right populism as returning to a pre-modern politics before the triumph of pluralism and tolerance is to evade the various ways that anti-migrant, anti-Muslim, and racial politics are imbricated within the longer histories of both Christianity and political liberalism. The continued tendency to disavow the political theology of far-right populism as hijacking genuine Christianity or liberalism is to fail to come to grips with the complex legacies and histories that Norton's *On the Muslim Question* so persuasively diagnoses. To riff off her title, this volume has shown how the populist question raises vital challenges that touch on question of nationalism and liberalism, epistemology and metaphysics, religion and pluralism, inclusion and exclusion, as well as modernity and history. The study of the spirit of populism is also an examination of the political theological legacy of the West.

2 Populism beyond the West

The spirit of populism is neither constrained to the West, nor to our particular political moment. Throughout this volume, we have sought to broaden our analysis and understanding of the spirits of populism and political theology by considering a wide variety of cases, reaching from conspiracy theories to the longer histories of Christian Europe to the multiple contestations over sovereignty in Jewish and Christian thought. The chapters illustrate the diverse ways that theo-political movements have mutated and the inherently plural ways that power and belonging have been enacted and imagined

9 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003), 159.

10 See Ulrich Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism – Methods and Metaphors," in this volume.

in conceptualizations of the true people. This volume concentrated on the West with its Christian or Judeo-Christian roots in order to raise and reflect on questions of sovereignty, power, the people, and religion within the legacy of Europe and North America in sufficient depth and detail. However, we also need to consider the diffuse ways that political theologies of populism shape everything from current Indian state policies toward Muslims to the return of militarism in Egypt after the Arab Spring. However, answering these questions already shows that any study of the spirit of populism cannot be confined to the West. Particularly Fatima Tofighi and Julie Cooper take account of this in their chapters, pushing beyond the concentration on Europe from the perspectives of Muslim and Jewish political thought.[11] To deepen further our analysis of the various movements and contradictions of political theologies, it is vital to expand our studies of populism beyond a focus on the legacies of the West and of Christianity to understand the growth of populist politics in India, the Philippines, Brazil, Turkey, Egypt, and elsewhere

The question remains, however, if political theology is the appropriate methodological approach for studying such diverse global movements. This is an especially pertinent question given political theology's emergence within the conceptual framework and historical development of both European secularism and Latin Christianity. Three of the most influential thinkers in the rise of political theology—Carl Schmitt, Ernst Kantorowicz, and Giorgio Agamben—focus primarily on understanding the transformations, genealogies, and transmutation of Latin Christianity and European state power. For all their differences, the operating assumptions about political and divine power emerge from the Latin West. The suppositions that undergird Kantorowicz's work on the two kingly bodies or Schmitt's analysis of the state as a secularized theological concept are grounded in longer legacies of Augustine's two cities or medieval understandings of the two swords or two kingdoms.[12] As this volume has illustrated, these political theological frameworks are key factors for understanding the populist political theologies in Europe and North America as they provide insights into the ways that Christianity and secular liberalism are deeply intertwined, even if they are distinguished.

Certainly the legacies of colonialism, the modern-nation state's origins in Europe, and globalization, also mean that the importance of Christian-secular

11 See Fatima Tofighi, "Hermeneutics, Politics and Liberalism in Islamic Modernity: Beyond Populism" and Julie E. Cooper, "Can Jewish Ethics Speak to Sovereignty?," in this volume.

12 See again Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* and Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985).

political theology is no longer limited to Europe and North America. At the same time, classic conceptual analyses are not sufficient for expanding political theology into a global field of study. If we are to understand and engage political theologies in their various and diverse global expressions and interconnections, we have to consider particular histories, political practices, formations, rituals, myths, languages, and more.

Here lie possibilities that might aid the development of what I have elsewhere called comparative political theology.[13] I will focus primarily on the possibilities of a renewed engagement with Islamic thought and practice, especially given the aforementioned import of discourse about Islam in Western political theologies of populism. In the opening of this volume, Schmiedel critically explores how studies of populism deploy, often crudely, an analogy between Islamism and the misuse or hijacking of Christianity by right-wing populists.[14] Just as Islamists alter true Islam for political ends, so too do far-right groups appropriate the symbols and language of Christianity. This tendency to protect a pure religious practice by accusing populists of misuse was a recurring feature in many opinion pieces on the January 6, 2021 storming of the United States Capitol. The fact that bibles, crosses, and shofars were used in the protest around the capitol illustrate how Christian symbolism was intertwined with nationalist, populist, and civil religion. Building on the questions about Christianity and the critical study of religions that this metaphor raises, as explained in the introduction to this volume, it is important to see how this analogy serves to locate the diverse expressions of Islamism and Islamic political thought primarily through the frame of 9/11. The very term hijacking testifies to this propensity

Islamism or Political Islam, if we must hesitatingly use these terms, are themselves complex and multifaceted phenomena, covering everything from anti-colonial movements in the 1940s to popular revival work in the 1990s to jihadi groups like al-Qaeda.[15] Islamism is not a single movement, but an umbrella term. Moreover, Political Islam is marked throughout by important political theological conceptualizations of power, community, justice, and transformation that demand engagement and theorization. These conceptualizations resonate with certain Western Christian and secular discourses, especially around the import of sovereignty, but diverge in fundamental ways

13 Joshua Ralston, *Law and the Rule of God: A Christian Engagement with Sharīʿa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1–47.

14 See again Schmiedel, "Introduction: Political Theology in the Spirit of Populism."

15 For more see the contributions to *Islamism: Contested Perspectives on Political Islam*, ed. Richard Martin and Abbas Barzegar (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009).

given their Islamic framing and the distinct histories of Muslim empires and Western colonialism.[16]

By equating Islamism or Political Islam exclusively with terrorism, we evade engagement with one of the most important modern political theological movements. Roxanne Euben's work on Islamist thought in general and Sayyid Qutb in particular offers a vital corrective.[17] She troubles the ways that Western scholars, politicians, and the media render Islamism as anti-modern, anti-liberal, and anti-Western. While Qutb surely critiques the West, modernity, and political liberalism, Euben's work proposes that a closer study of Qutb's thought shows intersections with a number of contemporary thinkers and movements within Western Europe and North America. These connections are not only with right-wing Christian fundamentalist or the populist movements of the far right, but also with political thinkers and critics of modernity such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Hannah Arendt. Qutb may be a 'religious totalitarian,' but he is also, at times, an incisive critic of modern social, religious, and political arrangements who has garnered a wide and diverse following.

Moreover, recent studies of Qutb, as well as other leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Hassan al-Banna, have noted overlapping and diverging relations between Islamism and various other political movements, both in the West and in Egypt. For instance, Najib George Awad asks if John Milbank's critiques of secularism and call for a re-enchanted Christian political theology might overlap in surprising ways with al-Banna's call for a renewed Islamic politics.[18] Likewise, Fawaz A. Gerges's *Making the Arab World* shows how Qutb's distinct political thought emerged both with and then later against Arab Nationalism and secularism.[19] Taken together, these studies suggest the possibility of a new form of political theology that engages, not only interdisciplinary, but in a mode of comparative analysis. Islamism is not interpreted exclusively as an example of religious fundamentalism that has altered the tolerant core of Islam; instead, close attention is given to how the theologies and

16 See Joshua Ralston, "Political Theology in Arabic," *Political Theology* 19 (2018): 549–552.

17 See Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). For accounts of Qutb, see Sayed Khateb, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Quṭb: The Theory of Jahiliyah* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and John Calvert, *Sayyid Quṭb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

18 Najib George Awad, "The 'End of Dialogue' and Christian-Muslim Interrelations: Dialogue as Self-Perception Venue," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 32 (2021): 5–20.

19 Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash that Shaped the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

arguments of Qutb both resonate with and are intertwined in other theo-political discourses, from anti-colonialism to Arab nationalism to Christian theology. By attending more closely to his thought, not to mention other diverse expressions of Islamic political thought and action, new avenues for comparative political theological engagement and study emerge.

Engaging with Islamist thought and practice in a serious, critical, and nuanced fashion may also provide surprising new insights into our understandings of the various spirits of populism. In fact, there are key features of Islamist discourse and practice that might be read through the lens of populism, ideas that trouble clear divisions between populist left and populist right. For instance, Islamism emerged in part as a critique of both religious and political authorities, who had failed the people and created a stagnation that allowed for Western colonialism. In response, Rashid Rida, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad ʿAbduh, and many other reformists called for a return to Islamic sources and demand that Islamic knowledge be made accessible to the people and not just the religious elite. This led to what Nathan Brown has dubbed, a "democratization of shariʿa based discourse" whereby all Muslims were able to reclaim responsibility for their own learning and growth in the umma.[20]

Qutb's reflections on politics illustrate how Islamism might be relevant for the study of populism proposed by this volume. In *Social Justice in Islam* and his manifesto *Maʿalim fiʾl-Ṭariq* (*Signposts on the Road*), Qutb rejects Islamic philosophy, the traditional schools of Law, and *kalām,* and argues that most of Muslim society is in fact *jāhiliyyah* ('ignorance,' a term typically used to describe pre-Islamic Arabia). Instead of engaging with the richness of Islamic philosophy, law, or theology or dialoguing with religious others, Qutb contends that renewal is to be found "only in its own theoretical sources: the Qurʾān and the Traditions, the life of its Prophet and his everyday customs."[21] A pure Islam purged from any mingling with philosophy, Christianity, or Western political practice provides the only avenue for Islamic renewal and advancement. There is also a melding of left-wing economics and the call to economic redistribution that challenges both capitalism and communism, through an Islamic socialism. In order to accomplish this, Quṭb proposes what Vincent Cornell

20 Nathan J. Brown, "Egypt: Cacophony and Consensus in the Twenty-first Century," in *Shariʿa Politics: Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 94.

21 Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam,* trans. John B. Hardie, trans. revised Hamad Hamid Algar (Oneonta: Islamic Publications International, 2000), 38.

has termed "*Sharīʿa* fundamentalism,"[22] a form of *Sharīʿa* largely stripped of the nuance of *fiqh*, instead envisioned as a divine natural law directly enacted by a renewed caliph and/or Muslim nation-states. Islam is renewed through a vanguard of pure Muslims, who renew themselves and challenge the compromises and impurities of the existing political and religious leaders. Qutb's thought, much like the positions of some of the populists studied in this volume, depended in part on his critique of both external enemies—Christianity, Zionism, and Western imperialism—as well as internal enemies—Arab nationalists and compromised Muslims. The true Muslim community, like the true populist people, must be transformed from within, even as the borders of belonging must be maintained. Part and parcel of the emergence of Qutb's Islamism is the deployment of populist tropes: critiques of the leadership, a call for a return to origins, the invocation of a Muslim golden age, and the creation of boundaries of belonging that identify the true people or *umma*. Qutb's own position, however, cannot be constrained by the binaries of left-wing or right-wing populism. His call for renewed economic justice, concern for the poor and oppressed, and critique of the hegemony of capital also indicate the ways his political theology serves as a tool for anti-colonial and liberative movements. The resonance with this volume's studies of the complex entanglements between theology, philosophy, memory, religion, and political activism are evident in Qutb's work.

3 Political Theology in the Mirror

This brief conclusion is ultimately an invitation to consider how both far-right populism and Islamism raise a mirror to Western liberalism and current habits of political theology. Rather than look away from the alternative ways of enacting and understanding justice, community, and theo-politics that these movements present, we might linger with their challenges. Attentive engagement and nuanced comparative analysis do not foreclose the possibility of critique, which remains necessary for those of us who view scholarship as oriented toward not only understanding, but also justice. At the same time, critique of populism, be it of the far-right or of certain Islamist movements, also requires self-criticism. By thinking in more comparative and interdisciplinary

22 Vincent Cornell, "Reasons Public and Divine: Liberal Democracy, Sharīʿa Fundamentalism, and the Epistemic Crisis of Islam," in *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Richard C. Martin and Carl Ernst (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2010).

ways that note similarities and distinctions across religious and geographic traditions, something like a comparative political theology of justice might emerge. Engaging further in more detailed and specific comparative political theologies, be they between Christian and Muslim movements as I suggest, or between Hindu and Buddhist nationalism in India and Myanmar, shows how the spirit of populism and the insights of the political extend far beyond the confines of this volume. They invite further reflection, study, and analysis in the hopes that spirit of political theology might move in a more coalitional and comparative direction.[23]

23 For the significance of reading political theology in a coalitional as well as comparative direction, see Ulrich Schmiedel, "The Theopolitics of the Migrant: Toward a Coalitional and Comparative Political Theology," in Christianity and the Law of Migration, ed. Silas W. Allard, Kristin E. Heyer, and Raj Nadella (London: Routledge, 2021), 212–229.

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