



Masculinity, Citizenship, and Demography: the Rise of Populism

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Abstract

The article examines the rise of contemporary populist movements in Europe and North America. These movements are driven primarily by working-class men who feel marginalized by developments in employment, work conditions, family life, and, in particular, by gender politics and the modern status of women. The growth of the service sector has created new opportunities for women. Demography, especially the decline in the fertility rate, has been neglected in sociological theories of the modern development of radical populism. With a declining and ageing population, the labor market depends increasingly on immigrant workers. These circumstances—feminism and migration—fuel the frustration of marginalized men who form the basis of radical populism.

Keywords Citizenship · Demography · Employment · Masculinity · Populism

Introduction: Citizenship, Neoliberalism, and the Transformation of Capitalism

My argument is that the erosion of social or welfare citizenship is an important aspect in the transformation of the status of men and hence in the transformation of masculinity in Western democracies. This transformation is one driving force behind various forms of populist militancy that are associated with changes to masculinity. Post-war social citizenship had three major pillars or foundations that were the duties of the citizen, namely work, public service, and finally family formation. These duties were also the basis of the entitlements of the citizen. Employment has been important for both traditional notions of masculinity and social status. By working and paying taxes, men enjoyed what we can call “contributory rights” in terms of their contributions to both the society and the economy. Public service could take many forms including jury service or military service through conscription. These social contributions might also include service on local councils or

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voluntary associations. Finally, marriage and reproduction are obvious but perhaps neglected aspects of citizenship and masculinity. Without reproduction, there cannot be population replacement to support the continuity of a society. With radical changes to these three pillars, social citizenship has been eroded and with it the traditional roles and status of men. The thrust of my argument is that changes to social citizenship are the basis of changes to the status of men and to the characteristics that defined traditional forms of masculinity. These developments are also the background to populism, distrust of government, and anger at the changing balance of power between the sexes (Elias, 1987).

Although these social developments have taken place with changes to the characteristics of industrialization from the late nineteenth century, many of the significant changes occurred in the post-war period or more precisely during “the Thatcher Years” (1979–1990). The period 1945 to 2023 provides the historical backdrop to my theoretical analysis of citizenship and populism. Although I focus here on the British case, these developments were in fact global. These global social and political developments were closely connected with changes in the capitalist economy with the rise of neo-liberal or Chicago economics from the 1970s. Margaret Thatcher set out to transform the post-war political settlement that had created the welfare state (“the Nanny State”) and was the underpinning of social citizenship (Heppell, 2014). While she recognized the importance of public health provision for an ageing population, she was committed to developing a private sector at the level of general practitioners and in the provision of hospitals (Thatcher, 1993: 607). This process of privatization was a significant departure from the background assumptions of public ownership and provision. There has also been ongoing pressure to privatize pension schemes to address the issues of an ageing population (Blackburn, 2004). Despite her efforts to change public health provision, the promise to defend the NHS has become an important requirement for electoral success at the ballot box. Thatcher had been relatively successful in her confrontation with British trade unionism for example in her conflict with “Mr Scargill’s Insurrection” (Thatcher, 1993:339–378). In the view of her supporters like Ken Clarke (2016:232), it was not the miners’ strike but the community charge (or poll tax as it came to be known) that did long-lasting damage to the Conservative Party.

Post-war citizenship rights had been clearly identified in Britain by Marshall (1893–1982) and Ralf Dahrendorf (1929–2009). I use the adjective “social” in social citizenship to take the analysis away from the narrow political and legal understanding of citizenship in order to give it a firmer sociological grounding. Marshall’s lecture at Cambridge on “Citizenship and Social Class” in 1949 has become the classic account in British sociology of the evolution of social rights (Marshall, 1950). I treat the rise and fall of post-war policies to support full employment and sickness benefits as one component in the changing character of the “working man” and more broadly masculinity. It is possible to see a clear linkage between employment, income, and contributory rights. Keynesian economics was primarily driven by the need to create full employment through state intervention and thereby to put money in workers’ pockets to function as consumers to drive the economy. Citizenship rights were also to support retired workers through a national health and pension system. Finally, the health services, which were free at the point of delivery,

supported workers who, either through sickness, accident, or economic change, had fallen out of full employment. The Education Act of 1944, which made provision for free secondary education for all, was another major plank in the expansion of citizenship rights.

In response to the Great Depression, the New Deal was the political project of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was the President from 1933 to 1945. He oversaw a raft of legislation that created a range of welfare provisions and required an expansion of state activity, including over the economy. The New Deal developed far-reaching legal and economic changes through the Tennessee Valley Authority Act, the National Recovery Act, the Glass Steagall Act, the Works Progress Administration, and the National Relations Act. In the USA, the legacy of FDR's policies was seen by his Republican critics as a form of socialism. There is the long-standing debate in response to the famous publication by Werner Sombart (1977) about "Why is there no socialism in the United States?" While Sombart presents a plausible sociological explanation for the missing socialist tradition, in fact, many conservatives believed that the New Deal (1933–1939) created a socialist America.

Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the USA shared similar ideas and policies that are now known broadly as "neoliberalism" (Harvey, 2005). Both were influenced by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. Reagan, who was President of the USA from 1981 to 1989, in response to the legacy of Roosevelt and his New Deal strategy, adopted liberal economic policies. Reagan developed a strategy to reduce government spending, cut taxes, and reduce regulation. The Budget and Reconciliation Act of 1981 introduced program cuts, brought in taxation cuts that favored the wealthy, and expanded means testing of welfare entitlements. In the short term, these policies had the effect of stimulating growth and reducing unemployment. The legacies of the New Deal and the British welfare state were revised, if not finally undermined, by both Reagan and Thatcher. Keynesian economic theories were replaced by free market doctrines under the Washington Consensus and by a social agenda that changed American and British capitalism. It can be argued however that Reagan only began the move towards small government, because at the same time, he increased expenditure on the military. Nevertheless, Reaganomics were continued by both Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. In particular, Clinton continued to support financial deregulation and free trade under the NAFTA agreement. He passed the "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act" in 1996. The purpose of the Act was to reduce the welfare rolls. Welfare benefits would be withdrawn from a person who failed to seek work or who declined the offer of work. The Act allowed employers to reduce wages and increase the burdens of work without appropriate compensation. In short, neo-liberalism was a policy shared by both Republican and Democratic administrations (Meeropol, 1998).

This "financialization of capitalism" was the background to the subsequent financial crisis with the collapse of Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. in 2008, following the failure of two hedge funds in Bear Stearns in 2007 (Greenberg, 2010). In the same year, the British bank Northern Rock applied for emergency support from the Bank of England. The bank was nationalized at a cost of 100 billion sterling. Further bailouts were required in Iceland, the Benelux governments, and Germany. The financial crisis was a consequence of deregulated markets, speculation in the

housing market, and dependence on sub-prime mortgage strategies (Calhoun & Derlugian, 2011). The British economy was highly exposed because the finance sector generated 30% of the gross domestic product compared to 8% in the USA. In response to the crisis, “austerity packages: were imposed on “southern Europe,” namely Greece, Spain, and Portugal. In retrospect, these strategies may have caused unnecessary damage to both economy and society as they reduced economic growth rates and produced a downward spiral. The measures also produced political chaos. Contemporary populist movements in Europe such as Podemos in Spain (Booth & Baert, 2020) and in Syriza Greece (Ovenden, 2015) have been associated with the response to the financial crisis and the imposition of austerity packages.

These economic and political developments had been anticipated by Karl Polanyi (1944) in *The Great Transformation*. His topic was not the transformation of capitalism as such, but the market and the marketization of society, and the damage it had inflicted on society and on the natural world. Polanyi rejected the idea of “free markets” arguing that they always depended on state intervention. In fact, *laissez-faire* was planned to protect the property values and the wealth of the bourgeoisie. The gold standard played a crucial role in protecting the assets of the elite that managed the City of London. At the same time, the “free” labor markets were designed to force workers to accept the employment conditions on offer to avoid the harsh conditions of the poor house. Polanyi was obviously aware of the challenge of free markets to the well-being of the citizens. By contrast, the Marshall’s evolutionary model of the expansion of citizenship from legal, to political to social rights, presented an optimistic picture of British social history. Marshall, and typically those British sociologists who adopted his typology of rights, did not envisage the sudden decline and ultimate erosion of such rights that followed neoliberal policies. By contrast, Dahrendorf (1990:121), who died in 2009, had witnessed what he called the rise of “casino capitalism.”

The Erosion of Citizenship

The three supports to social citizenship have changed radically from the 1970s onwards, and structural changes in the economy resulting from the neoliberal economic agenda explain the changing status of the male worker and the rise of modern populism. At this stage, I simply note that, with the decline of manufacturing, mining, and agriculture, many traditional forms of male employment have declined or disappeared with technological change. In the modern economy, almost ninety percent of the population in Great Britain is employed in services. These changes have also witnessed the expansion of female employment in pink-collar work. Another factor is that, while employment rates in Britain have been historically high, income inequality has increased, and basic pay has not kept up with structural changes in the economy, the housing and rental market, or the rising cost of living. With rising house prices, it is difficult for young people to buy a house or to cover rental costs. Many young people now live with their parents without the financial ability to fund their own households and related independent modes of living. There have also been radical changes in culture with growing acceptance of changing gender identities

and same-sex marriage. I argue that these changes have eroded, or at least challenged, the traditional idea of masculinity. These developments in turn explain much of the hostility towards feminism and women's rights in far-right political groups.

Building on the legacy of Marshall, I argue that social citizenship cannot be separated from the availability of meaningful work. Keynesianism was aimed at creating employment. The much-quoted cynical statement in this connection was "The government should pay men to dig holes in the ground and then fill them up again." In fact, this quotation is not to be found in *The General Theory*, but there is a similar argument about the economic stimulus that would result from digging holes and burying bottles filled with bank notes (Keynes, 1957: 129). Britain had enjoyed a prolonged period of full employment based on the backlog of investment opportunities from the interwar and war years, and from an increase in the scarcity of labor relative to capital (Skidelsky, 2009:127). Keynes's commitment to full employment had to face the pessimistic view of the Treasury that the Beveridge proposals would produce a short-term boom followed by a period when aggregate supply would exceed demand. Why is employment a condition of citizenship? One basic way to understand the notion of social citizenship in relationship to work is to quote from Judith Shklar's *American Citizenship* (1998) where she observed simply that a citizen works and has an income. The worker, in the American context, is neither a slave nor an aristocrat. In return for their contributions to the public good, citizenship offers the worker dignity and respect. By working, a citizen has an income that gives him or her a certain independence, status, and resources to form a household or to live independently. With an income comes eventually the burden of taxation to support the welfare state. I call these rights "contributory" because it is through these contributions that the state has a tax base to build welfare institutions. In more technical terms, rights and duties are correlative, namely that a right to something brings a duty with it. Income is also important for the final pillar of citizenship whereby the citizen creates a household within which men and women traditionally came together as a family with children who in turn became the next generation of citizens. The logic of the Shklar position is clearly that unemployment and to a lesser extent under-employment undermine the worker's sense of worth and self-respect and the capacity to function as competent citizens. In traditional colloquial terms, the unemployed or under-employed man is no longer the upright citizen. This humiliation feeds into resentment against those who can look down on the feckless man. I use "feckless" here, because of its connection with "effect." The feckless man is ineffective. Recent theories of populism have underestimated the role of resentment in oppositional politics (Turner, 2011), while concentrating on related but different emotions such as rage and anger.

Populist movements have been around for a long time and are not the product of modern technological modernization. Russian populism was active in the 1860s and 1870s when the main target was the emperor and the imperial family, and the main issue was serfdom. Populists looked towards the peasant commune or *obshchina* that was organized into a collective *mir* as a free association of peasants. Populists believed this system could form the basis of a free and democratic Russia. They distrusted intellectuals, specialists, and all forms of cleverness (Berlin, 1994). We need in addition to take seriously the long history of populism in the USA which had its origins

in Mid-West agrarian radicalism. American Populism is normally associated with the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party in the late nineteenth century. In short, the profile of populism is complicated by its controversial and much-disputed narrative structure (Allcock, 1971). However, populism has gained increasing attention from social scientists, especially following President Trump's election victory in 2016. One indication of the growing political influence of populism came with the *Unite the Right* rally in Charlottesville Virginia in August 2017 when right-wing protestors were chanting "You will not replace us" and "Jews will not replace us." This slogan is based on the misguided assumption that much of the American business world is run by Jews. This antisemitism runs counter to the normal assumption that modern populism is based on Islamophobia.

These political developments are often associated with a particular slice of the social structure namely the "left behind," "the deplorables," and "the chavs." This section of the population is broadly understood to be those workers who did not benefit from the globalization of the economy, because the traditional male sector of industry disappeared or because they did not possess the qualifications and skills required by the growing service sector. These terms, especially "the deplorables," are obviously pejorative, but they seek to identify and to describe people without a college education, without secure employment, on low incomes, and without adequate pensions or savings. This sector of the community is typically assumed to be the supporters who form the base of populism. A more accurate term for this section of the population is captured by the idea of a "precariat," or simply that section or sections of the population who are most at risk from economic, technical, and social change. These terms also carry a cultural resonance with the idea of incivility. We need to consider how these large-scale changes in culture and demography have had a distinctive impact on the traditional idea of male roles in society and of masculinity as a stable gender identity. This interpretation of the origins of populism needs to be qualified since these changes to employment, gender relationships, and masculinity have consequences for a much broader section of the population including for example employed men on low wages in low-status occupations. Although the idea of the "precariat" (Standing, 2011) certainly describes the life experience of a large section of the population, working men in blue-collar employment may also feel a sense of neglect and marginalization. A recent national survey of the "Far Right" in Australia found that among the 335 male respondents, 25% were under 25, and 50% were under 35 years. The men were mainly in blue-collar work with 58.6% working full time while 6.9% were looking for work. Sixty-three percent were pessimistic about the future, but their principal complaint was against feminism, lesbian and gay culture, and the liberal establishment. They see themselves as marginalized white working men. What they had in common was frustration, pessimism, and resentment towards women (Nilan, 2022).

Masculinity

I construct an argument that connects populism to the consequences of economic and demographic change on the status of men resulting in what, for want of a better phrase, has been described as "the crisis of masculinity" (Fidelda, 2007).

There is a significant literature on the changing nature of masculinity, but I submit that many of the economic and demographic features of these developments have received insufficient attention. A significant background to these changes in gender and gender relationships also includes the erosion of citizenship. Recent debates about masculinity have been significantly influenced by the work of R. W. Connell. In the early work, Connell analyzed a basic model of masculinity which was socially and economically dominant insofar as “bread-winning” was the foundation of hierarchical power relations between men and women in the household (Carrigan et al., 1985). However, this hegemonic masculinity was as much cultural as economic; it involved the idea that men were tough and where necessary, violent. Its internal psychological contradictions also produce fear and anxiety. This early model of hegemonic masculinity was criticized for being too rigid in promoting a view of men that was based on a fixed character type. In its modified form, the theory recognized the complex nature and diversity of masculinities and took note of the range of competing masculinities in different parts of the world (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In more recent work, Connell developed the typology of masculinities to include subordinate, complicit, and marginalized that are hierarchically organized under hegemonic masculinity. In this discussion of masculinity, while recognizing the contributions of Connell, I attempt to connect debates about masculinity more firmly in the arena of citizenship and discuss the connections between status and social class in relation to masculinity and right-wing extremism. The issue of fatherhood as a defining characteristic of men and masculinity is understated or absent in masculinity studies. My argument is, somewhat contra to Connell, that the erosion of citizenship and its underlying causes present a serious challenge to the traditional role of men as workers, husbands, and fathers, and that right-wing militancy is an expression of that underlying resentment following a sense of status loss. We cannot understand this transition in gender roles without looking at the transformation of citizenship and its deeper connections to demographic change.

Demographic Transitions and the Great Replacement

The issue of population trends has been strangely absent from recent social science literature on social and political movements. In his *Population: A Problem for Democracy* (Myrdal, 1940), Gunnar Myrdal had already identified the demographic challenge to the European democracies. For example, as early as 1925, Swedish society was already below a replacement rate and he warned that, without a robust population policy, the Western democracies would simply disappear. The connection between social citizenship and demography was also recognized by Judt (2005:536) in his comprehensive *Postwar* in that the welfare state rested on two assumptions that economic growth and job creation would continue and secondly that “birth rates would remain well above replacement level...the demographic miscalculation was the most dramatic of the two.”

In the demographic literature, it is now conventional to identify three demographic transitions. The first demographic revolution was, so to speak, a pure theory of demographic processes. The idea of the first demographic revolution was developed by Kingsley Davis (1945) in “The World Demographic Transition.” As death rates fell, especially with a fall in infant mortality rates, the populations of Western democracies grew rapidly. In the second demographic revolution, fatality rates and birth rates were both falling relatively steadily (Lesthaeghe, 2014). The population grows, if at all, as life expectancy increases. In the third demographic revolution, cultural and social factors begin to play a significant role in understanding demographic change. More attention is paid to marriage rates, divorce, and voluntary childlessness (Lesthaeghe, 2014; Lesthaeghe & Needs, 2002). With these social and cultural changes, fertility rates continue to decline. Many societies, such as Singapore and South Korea, have struggled to restore population growth, but such factors as female employment mitigate against a restoration of the traditional family and high fertility.

With the third demographic transition, there are important cultural and legal changes to gender relationships and marriage patterns, including changes to language. For example, references to “mother” and “father” are replaced by the “birthing parent.” In contemporary societies, marriage rates are low, and there is a disconnect between marriage and procreation. Marriage is late, “voluntary infertility” or child-free marriages are common, and same-sex marriage and no-fault divorce are taken for granted. Alongside these cultural changes, fertility rates continue to decline. Marriages are delayed, and reproduction is no longer an automatic outcome of partnerships. Courtship, engagement, and marriage come at a financial cost. Alongside these changes to marriage and reproduction, humans continue to live longer lives into their late 70 s. In fact, the combined life expectancy of men and women in Italy was 83.1 years, and in the UK, 81.0 years (WHO, 2012). One result, especially for Western societies is that, while fertility rates decline and remain low, there is a steeply ageing population and consequently a declining labor force. The result is fertility below replacement and the demographic system is no longer self-correcting. A society needs a replacement rate or a TFR of around 2.1, the TFR or the hypothetical fertility of a woman if she completes her reproductive cycle around 49 years.

In addition to these changes, there has been a dramatic decline in the male sperm count, which has experienced a dramatic fall that has been measured from the 1960s (Sengupta et al., 2017). Recent research shows that the male sperm count in Western societies has dropped by 50% in the last 40 years. Furthermore, there is evidence that men lack adequate counselling or no counselling at all for a condition that is a challenge to their masculinity (Petok, 2015). Indeed, men may experience this problem as “the end of the line” (Webb & Daniluk, 1999). The causes of infertility with a decline in sperm quantity and quality are associated with pollution and the widespread use, especially domestic use, of plastics. If we combine these changes—declining marriage rate, rising divorce rate, declining fertility rate, and a dramatic fall in the male sperm rate—they represent a dramatic challenge to the traditional role, status, and self-image of men as husbands, fathers, and providers.

One cannot understand the changing nature of masculinity without considering the demographic factors behind far-right politics. The ideological notion of “the great

replacement” of the population by migrant men who are more fertile finds some unlikely support from the third demographic transition in which low fertility and ageing populations find at least one solution in extensive immigration “to refresh” the labor force. One result, especially for Western societies, is that, while fertility rates decline and remain low, there is an ageing population and consequently a declining labor force. These demographic changes also mean that, among various recruitment problems, the demographic base of the military is also shrinking. This development is significant insofar as governments want “boots on the ground” for certain military operations that cannot be conducted from the sky. Without conscription, dependence on mercenaries, such as Blackwater or the Wagner Group, becomes common.

Governments have responded to these demographic and social changes through five strategies. The first is to increase the productivity of labor through technological innovation in order that less workers produce more. The Amazon marketing strategy may be an example. The second is to remove compulsory retirement and extract more labor power out of ageing populations. The third solution is to recruit more women into the labor force especially into the service sector where the brain is more important than the brawn. The fourth is to depend on immigration to create a youthful, cheap, and flexible labor force, or finally all of the above. These strategies have negative consequences for older workers and increasing immigration may have the effect of increasing populist opposition.

It is perhaps ironic that questions about the changing demographic structure of advanced societies have not featured in the academic discussion of populism, even though demography plays a large, often implicit, part in populist ideology. One important figure in the debate about the growing threat of Muslim immigration to the indigenous white populations of Europe is Jean Renaud Camus who is well known for his idea of “the great replacement” (*Le Grand Remplacement*) namely that the white population of the West (especially in rural France) is being replaced by Muslims, and this demographic catastrophe is a consequence of the political agenda of the “replacist elites.” Camus belongs to a broad spectrum of French intellectuals associated with *Le Figaro* from the 1960s, who have promoted ethno-nationalism and opposed racial integration. Camus is the winner of the *Prix Feneon* (1977) and *Prix Amic* (1966). Born in 1946, Camus gained literary and cultural notoriety for his publications on homosexuality in *Tricks* in 1979 which was a chronicle of homosexual encounters in Paris and *Buena Vista Park* in 1980 which also became influential among the LGBT community. Camus is a cultural intellectual, because his primary aim is to preserve French civilization from erosion and corrosion rather than create or lead a political movement. However, his career became more obviously political in 2012 when he was a candidate in the French presidential election. On failing to gain sufficient support, he withdrew and gave his support to Marine Le Pen. In 2017 with Karim Ouchikn, he formed the pan-European *National Council of European Resistance*. The growth of the migrant population and the decline in the birth rate of white populations constitutes a “genocide by substitution.” Although the replacement of a white population by migrant Muslims, given their higher fertility rates when compared with white French citizens may be plausible, the replacement of French citizens is more likely to occur because of declining fertility rates and declining sperm counts rather than as a result of immigration.

The debate about multiculturalism, immigration, and population replacement has also been explored by Kaufman (2018) in *Whiteshift*. Kaufman (2018:519–520) is critical of what he calls “asymmetrical multiculturalism” in which minority identities are lauded while white majority ones are denigrated. At present, what happens is that minorities set out identity-based concerns which many whites reject as divisive because they have been forced by left-modernism to repress their own ethnicity or because they cannot see that their “national” interests may consist of sublimate ethnic desires. These ideas regarding replacement or “whiteshift” have been the subject of significant criticisms (Bracke & Hernandez Aguilar, 2020). The idea that Muslim migrant populations have significantly higher total fertility rates than white host communities is factually incorrect. The empirical evidence suggests that over time, immigrant fertility conforms to national rates. In global terms, world fertility rates in Muslim communities have also declined. For example, with government support, Iran has one of the lowest rates in worldwide terms, and similarly, in North-African Muslim societies, fertility rates have been in decline (Turner, 2003).

Angry Men

What have these changes to do with masculinity and political extremism? My approach to populism rests on the idea that citizenship rights have been eroded by the effects of neo-liberal economic policies. Populist resentment is typically racist and directed against immigrants and refugees. However, the third demographic revolution is associated with economic dependence on migrant workers, and hence, immigration is required to sustain the working population. The erosion of citizenship and the effects of the third demographic revolution present a challenge to both the status and class positions of the white male working class. Their sense of resentment is fed by the growing independence of women, the visible presence of foreign workers, and the apparent indifference of elites. In response, there has been a global growth in men’s support groups offering advice and counsel over divorce, the health problems that arise after separation and divorce, and the problems of gaining access to their children. In the West, men’s rights groups have been active since the 1980. There are various ways in which fathers’ rights groups have actively resisted feminism. They have been critical of feminist proactive lobbying in relation to domestic violence provisions in family law. They are often critical of community initiatives such as refugees for victims of domestic violence. They have actively resisted the campaigning that is undertaken related to the extension of the powers of police and the support of reforms which ensure the day-to-day safety of victims of domestic violence. These raise obvious questions about whether feminist movements actively discriminate against men in the public domain (Farrel & Sterba, 2008).

Recent work has often seen right-wing populists as “the left behind” whose principal forms of employment have been eroded by economic change often brought about by globalization. Unemployed or under-employed coal miners in Virginia are one example. The focus on economic decline implies that social class is the critical factor in political protest against elites, globalization, and cosmopolitanism. However, Richard Hofstadter and Daniel Bell, writing on American conservatism in the 1960s, argued that class

and economic issues were not prominent issues in right-wing politics. In other words, traditional concerns among conservatives about economic problems had been replaced by status concerns (Bell, 1964; Hofstadter, 1964a) or by what Hofstadter subsequently called “cultural politics” (Hofstadter, 1964b). His interpretation of right-wing conservatives brings into question whether it is a social class or status position that plays the key role in the growth of far-right militant movements. While contemporary sociological analysis of populism focuses on the idea of the economically left-behind, Hofstadter (1964a, b:85) claimed that with status politics, there is a tendency to embody discontent not so much in legislative proposals as in grousing. What Hofstadter called “pseudo-conservatism” is not therefore explicitly concerned with economic issues or even with conventional politics. Their concerns are to do with a sense of disorder in society and culture “in relation to authority, characterized by their inability to find other modes for human relationship than those of more or less complete domination or submission” (Hofstadter, 1964a,89). In short, cultural issues may have equal importance as economic frustrations in underpinning men’s resentment.

Why are contemporary conservatives aggrieved? One answer is provided by Corey Robin (2011:58). “People on the left often fail to realize this, but conservatism really does speak to and for people who have lost something. It may be a landed estate or the privileges of a white skin, the unquestioned authority of a husband, or the untrammelled rights of a factory owner. Robin’s insight does however suggest that social class and status play a combined role in right-wing conservatism. The recent manifestations of populism between the financial crisis of 2008–2011 and the Brexit referendum in 2016 have certainly had causes that are connected to economics and social class. Austerity packages, instability in employment, housing and rental costs, and the erosion of pension rights have also been prominent issues in populist protests against wealthy elites and the apparent indifference of democratic governments to growing inequality. However, populism has also involved criticism of immigration policies, the presence of Muslim migrants, the influence of feminism, and the decline of male privilege. These criticisms are rooted in status anxieties about the perceived loss of respect and influence.

Populist Moments

The literature on populism has grown considerably since the 1990s (Betz, 1994). This discussion of the relationships between material factors relating to social class and cultural concerns relating to social status brings us to a separate issue, namely the role of intellectuals in populist movements. When populists are regarded as “the left behind,” the implication is that they are “losers” who do not fully understand their real economic interests, who vote for leaders who are clearly members of the elite, and who often hold to outmoded or irrational ideas, especially if their politics are heavily influenced by evangelical religion. This interpretation implies that populists embrace ideas that obscure the true interests of “the left behind.” Populists are thus unable to understand what social and economic policies are in their best interests, and hence, they will remain left behind. This characterization of populist

movements underestimates the impact of sophisticated ideas and ideologies from intellectuals that shape these populist ideologies.

Academic interest has been fueled by the emergence of populist political parties, especially in Europe. In particular, much contemporary political analysis has focused on the Northern League (Italy), Golden Dawn (Greece), *Fidesz* (Hungary), Freedom Party (Austria), Law and Justice Party (Poland), *Alternativ fuer Deutschland* (Germany), and UK-IP (UK). There has been widespread interest in and discussion of populism in recent social science literature, especially in political theory, but there is little agreement over a satisfactory definition of its principal characteristics and salient causes. Although there is general agreement about the electoral significance of these political parties, there is little general agreement about how populism should be defined, analyzed, and evaluated. The most basic, and probably the least persuasive, definition is simply that populism is a movement that appeals to “the people” against powerful elites, a remote state, and international alliances that have alienated voters against the elite, liberal governments, and their economic policies in favor of globalization. More specifically, populist parties are identified with right-wing extremism because they are typically racist and opposed to immigration and to gender equality.

The contemporary debate about populism, especially in Europe, has been dominated by relatively recent political developments following the crisis around Muslim migration or more specifically in response to the inflow of Middle East and North African refugees. In the American context, populism has a different history. It is associated with the rise of the Tea Party in 2008–9 following the surprise victory of Republican Scott Brown in the Massachusetts election. Tea Party members certainly embraced cultural issues: the presence of Muslims, illegal migrants, “free-loaders” especially among young people, and social decline. Their opposition to Barack Obama and “ObamaCare” can be seen as one aspect of their view that the decline of America followed the long-term consequences of the New Deal. Opposition to the legacies of President Obama became a general driving force of Trump’s election campaign. In contrast to this picture of cultural concerns, the Tea Party policy had a conventional economic outlook on small government, low taxation, and private health care—when it came under the wing of Freedom Works and Americans for Prosperity. For conservative Tea Party members, taxation is close to theft and can only be justified for very specific purposes such as military expenditure (Horwitz, 2013). Can we classify Tea Partiers as populists or as conventional conservatives? The definitive empirical study of the Tea Party was undertaken by Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson in *The Tea Party and the Making of Republican Conservatism* (2013), but an earlier article was “The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism” (Skocpol, Williamson, & Coggin, 2011). While their work on the Tea Party consistently refers to it as “conservative,” they do not refer to the movement as “populist.” The Tea Party did not consider themselves to be “the people” against either the elite or the state. They were not the left-behind or the precariat, and they drew considerable financial support from the rich and powerful. They were more concerned about the cost of Obama’s health policies than about cultural issues. They were fiscal conservatives, but they were not in principle opposed to Social Security and Medicare only to the expense. However, Tea Party activists did not support Paul Ryan’s budget which gave tax cuts to the rich and proposed deep cuts to health care, food stamps, and education. While

many Tea Party supporters are already in retirement, their primary concern was to prevent “free-loaders” from sponging off welfare benefits. Health care should go to people who have, over a lifetime, paid their taxes.

Although the Tea Party had clear ideas about taxation and small government, the dominant theme in American populism, indeed American politics, is that cultural concerns often take precedence over economic issues. These cultural issues are typically around education, evolution, abortion, religious freedom, and family values. The role of cultural issues is important because much of the literature on populism has focused on the economic conditions of the “left behind” rather than on the cultural agenda behind right-wing populism. An important contribution in shifting attention towards culture came with Thomas Frank’s *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* (2005). The “average working person is offended by the arrogant impositions of the (liberal) upper classes” (Frank, 2004:254). Backlash conservatism promotes “outrage, not satisfaction” because its policies are directed against elites—Donald Trump’s “Washington swamp”—not at social and economic policies that would re-energize mid-West farming economies. Furthermore, the cultural wars are not easily won or resolved—the battle over abortion in the *Roe v. Wade* (1973) was fought for many decades afterwards without a clear outcome. The aim of backlash conservatism is not necessarily to win battles over education or abortion but “to take offence, conspicuously, vocally, even flamboyantly” (Frank, 2004:121–2). While cultural concerns appear to be dominant in populist beliefs, religion has not been a prominent feature of European populism. However, when the issue is opposition to Muslim immigration, then populist movements occasionally refer to the importance of defending Christianity or Judeo-Christian civilization. However, the more common referent is “Christendom.” Behind these various perspectives on European civilization, there is another general notion of national membership with the revival of the secular idea of *Abendland* (Forlenza & Turner, 2019). By contrast, American populism is typically caught up in political debates about the role of Christianity in contemporary America, which distinguishes it from European populism, the ideology of which is largely secular. Evangelical Christian communities have played an important role in the electoral success of Trump within the Republican convention and in his presidency (Turner, 2019). Evangelicals, forgiving Trump and his many indiscretions, support him over abortion, Israel, education, and creationism.

Conclusion: Masculinity, Politics, and Demographic Change

Recent debates about populism have been couched primarily within the domain of political theory. In this article, I have sought to give the debate a distinctive sociological component by attempting to show how changes in employment, culture, and gender relationships have changed the character and role of men in modern societies. I have drawn on the work of historians such as Richard Hofstadter and sociologists such as Daniel Bell to show how changes in both class relations and status are driving forces behind populism, especially populist men’s movements. However, in my perspective, the missing factor in contemporary scholarship on populism and masculinity is demographic change specifically the effects of the third demographic revolution. Consequently, criticisms of political movements that oppose migration under the

heading of “the great replacement” have ignored how the decline in total fertility rates has required significant waves of immigration to maintain an adequate labor force. Camus’s complaint, that French villages have become ghost towns may bring him to make illiberal observations about the presence of Muslim women in the traditional hijab in his own township, may be objectionable, but his concern about deserted villages is based on real changes in the composition of the population of European societies which are by no means confined to France. Demographic change, developments in marriage, family and reproduction, and the erosion of citizenship have been major factors behind contemporary political movements. These diverse elements need to be fully integrated in order to construct a general theory of social and political change to explain contemporary populist movements.

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