

Social Policy under the Global Shadow of Right-wing Populism: A Debate

The Dark Sides of Social Policy: From Neoliberalism to Resurgent Right-wing Populism

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ABSTRACT

This Forum Debate explores the confluence of neoliberal, populist, conservative and reactionary influences on contemporary ideologies and practices of social policy, with a focus on the poorer peripheries of global capitalism. Several fundamental tensions are highlighted, which are largely overlooked by the social policy and development literatures. First, many recent social policy innovations have been discredited by their association with neoliberalism. The rising political Right has been much more successful than the Left at exploiting this discontent, despite simultaneously deepening many aspects of neoliberalism once in power. At the same time, right-wing movements have proactively used social policy as a political tool to fashion the social order along lines deemed amenable for their interests and ideologies, expressed along nationalist, racialized, ethnicized, nativist, religious, patriarchal or other lines, and to innovate practices of segregation, exclusion and subordination. While these synergies of neoliberal and right-wing populism are observed globally, they need to be carefully and differentially interpreted from the perspective of late industrializing (or late welfare state) peripheral countries. Nonetheless, common themes occurring across both centres and peripheries, as identified by the invited contributions to this Debate section, include exclusionary identity politics, hierarchical and subordinating inclusions, and patriarchal familialism. In this context, segregationism is an ominous possibility of post-neoliberal social policy.

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INTRODUCTION

Social policy has served as a powerful magnet for both political rage and mobilization within the contemporary global context of rising right-wing populist and authoritarian politics, from the US and the UK to India, Turkey, Brazil and beyond. In the previous wave of erstwhile triumphant but now apparently discredited neoliberalism, social policy was mostly vilified — at least, in its more universalistic, welfare-state inspired manifestations. Many have assumed that the page has turned with the rise of social protection agendas, epitomized by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) engagement in these agendas, even though this has occurred alongside renewed austerity and reform programmes pushed by these same international financial institutions (IFIs) in the context of global slowdown and debt overhang. In the meantime, the denigration of social assistance has been increasingly taken up as a focus of right-wing loathing, perpetuating rather than abandoning the neoliberal tropes of perverse work incentives and welfare dependence, albeit with increasingly racialized and/or nationalistic twists.

At the same time, however, social policies have also been used as political strategies by various contemporary right-wing and authoritarian movements, especially but not only by the so-called populist right, whether in democratic or non-democratic regimes. They have served as powerful vehicles for mobilizing conservative and reactionary populist sentiments beyond critique and towards political projects that construct and propagate nativist notions of ‘community’ as well as ideologies and practices of social order based on segregation, exclusion and subordination. This latter tendency has often been overlooked or underemphasized in the battles against the austerity and retrenchment that have been characteristic of neoliberalism. When it has been recognized, it is often interpreted as a reaction to neoliberalism, perhaps even the death of neoliberalism, insofar as one takes the liberalism of neoliberalism seriously.

There are reasons to question this interpretation, in particular because the segregating and exclusionary tendencies that are characteristic of the new Right were already apparent in ‘neoliberal’ social policy. This begs us to question the degree to which current right-wing populism, for instance, is really a reaction to neoliberalism or rather an extension of its more perverse but logical trajectories. Social policy is particularly pertinent to this question given its centrality within these contemporary political permutations.

This Forum Debate seeks to extend critical scholarship in these directions by examining the confluence of neoliberal, populist, conservative and reactionary influences on contemporary ideologies and practices of social policy, with a focus on the poorer peripheries of global capitalism. Social policy in this sense refers to the range of publicly or collectively provided, funded and/or regulated services and interventions that principally

target social provisioning (as opposed to economic policies that have social consequences, but that are not principally concerned with social provisioning). The conventional components are education, healthcare and social protection. Social protection in turn refers to social assistance (i.e. ‘welfare’ or ‘non-contributory’ transfers), social security/insurance (i.e. ‘contributory’ transfers), and formal and/or informal standards and regulations, such as in labour markets.¹ Social policy is also conventionally considered to encompass several related areas such as housing policy, child protection, family planning and some aspects of care work, insofar as these also relate to the function of providing for or influencing various social outcomes, such as learning, health, or the access to and the incidence of adequate and secure livelihoods and income.²

Within this broad understanding, social protection has received most of the attention of late as a narrower view of social policy, whereas it is properly understood as a subset of social policy. In particular, health and education provisioning have huge implications for social stratification and the social reproduction of inequality, and they touch a core nerve of social politics because they structure the ways that various social groups might come into contact with each other in moments of intimacy and vulnerability. Social policies are in this sense fundamentally political given that they serve as the basis for defining and instituting rights and entitlements, distributing public goods, redistributing wealth, and articulating some of the main mechanisms of integration and segregation within societies. For all of these reasons, a holistic consideration of social policy is needed in order to assess its relation to broader political dynamics.

With regard to the contemporary right-wing politics considered in this Debate, there are fundamentally two issues at stake in relation to social policy. The first is often framed in terms of a Polanyian double movement, referring to the idea of Karl Polanyi (1944) that the creation and extension of market society (or capitalism) elicits spontaneous responses from society to control and tame the dislocations brought about through such extensions. Many people have related this idea to the variety of social and political responses that have emerged to address the ills of neoliberalism from the

1. On this conceptualization of social protection, which has become common in international organizations, see an overview by Hujo and Gaia (2011).

2. For further discussion of this conceptualization of social policy, particularly as it pertains to development, see Fischer (2012, 2018) or Martinez Franzoni and Sanchez-Ancochea (2016). For broader treatments, see Gough et al. (2004), Hall and Midgley (2004) and Mkandawire (2004). Also note that in his definition of social policy, Mkandawire (2004: 1) defines social policy according to its economic functions, mostly with reference to its social protection functions, for example, interventions in the economy to influence livelihoods and income. A broader conceptualization arguably should include the social functions of social policy, such as the provisioning of schooling and healthcare to effect education and health outcomes, regardless of whether these have an income effect.

late 1970s onwards. Social policies have featured prominently as examples of such responses, such as the global rise of the social protection agenda.

However, these recent social policy innovations have been discredited by their association with a neoliberal policy framework that limits their transformative potential to challenge the various intersecting forms of inequality or social dislocation created or exacerbated by neoliberalism. This association refers to the increasing adoption or co-option of rights and related social agendas by neoliberal policy thinkers from the mid-1990s onwards — what Porter and Craig (2004) call ‘inclusive neoliberalism’, Betz (2018) calls a socially liberal variant of neoliberalism, Fraser (2017) and Kiely (2018, and this issue) call ‘progressive neoliberalism’, and Fine and Saad Filho (2017) and Putzel (this issue) call the ‘mature phase’ of neoliberalism. Because many of these social policies have come to symbolize the broader neoliberal project as some of its most tangible aspects for ordinary people, they have also come to be the focus of much of the social anger generated by these contradictions, particularly on issues of diversity, as highlighted by the work of Streeck (2014, 2019).

The Right has notably been much more successful at capturing and channelling this anger than the Left, precisely because of this uneasy association of the (New) Left with the neoliberal project. Examples of the latter include the New Democrats in the US in the 1990s, New Labour in the UK in the late 1990s and 2000s, and the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT — the Workers’ Party) in Brazil in the 2000s (on the latter, see Braga and Barbosa dos Santos, 2019; Lavinias, 2017; Saad-Filho, 2015, 2019). Several of the contributions to this Debate explore these contradictions, especially Kiely and Putzel, but also Buğra, Gudhavarthy and Vijay, Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton, and Riggirozzi. All of them contend to various degrees that many of the recent innovations in social policy have served to soften or even further advance neoliberal deepening, such as ‘reform’ agendas of retrenching formal social security, deregulating labour markets, and privatizing education, healthcare and pensions. Notably, this contention is not quite the same as the Polanyian double movement argument. Instead, it questions the degree to which such social policies have in fact been reactions to neoliberalism, versus just sly repackaging.

The second issue at stake — which has received far less scrutiny — is how social policy itself has been used as a political tool by right-wing and/or authoritarian movements or governments spearheading or channelling these reactions. This deals with the proactive and constructive uses of social policy to fashion the social order along lines deemed amenable for their ideologies — expressed along nationalist, racialized, ethnicized, nativist, religious, patriarchal or other lines — or else to support their political strategies, resources and interests. In other words, various elements of social policy are used to bolster or cement support for such new-right, often religious political movements, as well as to disseminate and/or reinforce certain ideological narratives that suit these ends.

These two interrelated issues are elaborated in the following four sections. The first discusses how the latter proactive uses of social policy have been largely overlooked by the social policy and development literatures, especially with respect to the dominant focus on the donor and allied scholarly driven social protection agenda. The second explores the relation between neoliberalism and such right-wing political movements through the lens of social policy. The third further elaborates these relations in terms of how they need to be carefully and differentially interpreted from the perspective of the late industrializing (or late welfare state) peripheral countries. The fourth returns to some of the main issues that are highlighted by the invited contributions to this Debate section, namely exclusionary identity politics, hierarchical and subordinating inclusions, and patriarchal familialism. The conclusion reflects on the revival and normalization of segregationism that is one of the ominous possibilities emerging from these social policy agendas under neoliberalism and right-wing politics.

TURNING A CENTRIST BLIND EYE

The use of social policy as a political tool for conservative, reactionary or regressive ends is not new. The conservative and authoritarian uses of modern social policy have been evident since the 19th century, even under ostensibly liberal political systems. The classic reference point is the Victorian New Poor Law of 1834, which was used to discipline the English poor with the threat of having to receive social assistance under extremely punitive, almost penal terms.³ Indeed, the liberal credentials of the British political system were belied by these practices of social assistance, at least from the perspective of poorer working class people. Other more recent examples include the use of schooling and healthcare provisioning or housing policy to enforce segregation in the US, whether explicitly during the John Crow era, or implicitly up to the present (see Rothstein, 2015; Solomon et al., 2019; Taylor, 2019). Nazism in Germany made very potent use of social policy in mobilizing popular support and ordering social relations, as explored in the 2019 edited book by Kott and Patel (see Burleigh, 1991); this built on the conservative Bismarckian foundations that were also originally intended to counteract socialist movements among the working classes. Various social policies were deployed under various colonial regimes, for organizing labour, enforcing segregation, or preventing unrest, among other functions (e.g. Drinot, 2011; Ferguson, 2015; Milton, 2007). The use of residential schools in Canada and Australia were similarly deployed as a means of violent, racist incorporation of indigenous peoples and of cultural genocide, with exclusionary outcomes despite assimilationist intents. Social

3. For an excellent overview of the contemporaneous debates leading up to this law, and those that followed, see Block and Somers (2003).

policy measures were used to institutionalize apartheid in South Africa — particularly in relation to housing, education and employment regulations — and similar measures have been used to enforce segregation and settlements in Israel and Palestine. Hayekians might also wish to lump any social democratic state intervention into private life as part of this mix, given their view that such interventions ultimately lead to totalitarianism, and scholars of Foucauldian governmentality might also agree that such interventions share a similar aim of social engineering and control. However, the key distinction is that the intention of social democratic state interventions is to overcome segregation and exclusions, whereas the illiberal right-wing approaches mentioned above intentionally and explicitly seek to engineer them instead.

Against this backdrop, the naïveté of most of the current scholarship on social policy in developing countries is striking. The dominant focus on social protection — cash transfers in particular — is mostly blind to such aspects of social ordering, disciplining and control, although with some important exceptions (as discussed below). A strong case can be made that this blindness is partly due to the co-opting of so much of the scholarship by bilateral and multilateral donor funding and agendas, as argued by Adesina (2011, and this issue) and by Peck and Theodore (2015). Whether due to vested interests or simply ideational conditioning, these agendas have advanced narrow residualist visions of social policy while at the same time being complicit — whether consciously or inadvertently — in neoliberal policy agendas more generally, as noted above. However, the blindness arguably also stems from a particular predicament faced by political and scholarly centres in the current context of rising right-wing politics. The squeeze from the Right has prompted a defensiveness from these centres towards critiques from the Left regarding whatever erstwhile incremental gains might have been made by centrist initiatives. This especially applies to social policy, where centrist or New Left political parties see their legacies as having been the most progressive, hence vindicating other deficiencies.

An alternative, more sophisticated argument for strategic blindness is that conservative approaches to social policy have nonetheless sometimes resulted in progressive evolutions (although often they have not). The classic case is the conservative Bismarckian regime in Germany, as mentioned above. Another, as often noted by Mkandawire (e.g. 2005: 7, citing Green-Pedersen 2003), is the example of movements towards universalistic social policies in Denmark initiated by right-wing rather than left-wing governments. These examples are sometimes evoked to justify a strategic tolerance towards more residualist initiatives, given that even very marginal steps might be catalysts for something greater (insofar as you can pick winners, to echo industrial policy debates).

The problem with such incremental gradualism is that conservative approaches have more often simply led to deeply entrenched dualisms that are subsequently very difficult to transform, as in most developing

countries. The classic cases in this sense are the Southern Cone countries in Latin America where, as noted by Barrientos (2004), the share of the labour force covered by social insurance schemes reached over 70 per cent by the end of the 1970s (in Chile, Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina). Yet the trend towards universalism in social insurance was abruptly aborted thereafter, while health and education systems remained deeply stratified. In this context, the Northern European cases might be exceptions, products of particular historical conjunctures that are not applicable today or to developing countries. These European conjunctures were also violent on a massive industrial scale. As argued by Kott and Patel (2019: 24–25), it was only the extremities of Nazism during the first half of the 1940s that pushed liberal democracies to move away from the eugenic, racist and imperialist tendencies and legacies that were evident within their own social policies up to World War II. However, this is hardly a desirable roadmap for the present, especially given that the eugenic, racist and imperialist tendencies were not eradicated by the post-war settlement but only suppressed, and are now resurfacing.

Regardless, there is a tendency within the policy and allied academic scholarship to view any expansion or extension of social policies and programmes as progressive advances, to the extent of framing gains as revolutionary, to be guarded and promoted even at the cost of critical enquiry. In the process, a wide variety of programmes often get lumped together. Hanlon et al. (2010), for instance, package together a very broad range of social protection programmes, from more employment-centred job creation or guarantee schemes, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India or the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia, to much more conservative, narrowly targeted and minimalist cash transfer programmes, with or without conditions, such as those that have proliferated across Latin America, Africa and Asia over the last two decades. Even more critical scholars such as Ferguson (2015) have characterized the latter residualist cash transfer programmes as representing some new form of distributive (or perhaps he means redistributive) politics, despite the fact that they clearly are not (from the perspective of social policy scholarship, which he mostly ignores),⁴ nor are they necessarily at odds with neoliberalism.⁵ Indeed, Adesina (this issue) argues that many of these programmes represent policy merchandizing that utilizes an instrumentality of clientelism within an imperial deployment of power that is in fact deeply subversive to the consolidation of democracy in African states. The subversion is due in part to the short-circuiting of state–citizen channels of accountability and of broad cross-class or cross-group coalitions that usually serve as the basis

4. For instance, Ferguson (2015) ignores the seminal works of Mkandawire (2001, 2005), as well as Adesina (2011) and other critical voices.

5. For a discussion of how these programmes are in fact quite aligned with neoliberalism, see Fischer (2010, 2018).

for more progressive evolutions within local political economies, and which donors seem determined to avoid for fear of imagined neo-patrimonialist machinations.

Yet, the fact that these programmes are celebrated as revolutionary or at least progressive evolutions, despite their diversity in modalities and political origins, gives reason for a critical pause. A small but growing critical scholarship on social policy in developing countries has taken up the task, pointing to the political aspects of such social protection programmes as technologies of statecraft, social control and ordering, and of reproducing and structuring inequalities rather than necessarily attenuating them, especially in health and education.⁶ The point is that social policy is inherently political as it fundamentally deals with the articulation and actualization of social norms and entitlements, and with social ordering, legibility and discipline, and it has different effects when deployed by groups with different agendas. In this sense, it is used by both the Left and the Right for these functions, although of course it is used differently, with different objectives, and guided by different ideological visions about moral social order. Yet these ideological and political economy aspects of social policy are mostly ignored in the self-celebratory social protection niche literature.

Again, the often-exaggerated euphoria or even evangelizing about these programmes by their proponents might be partly understood as a desire to solidify small marginal gains against ever-belligerent pressures to erode social policy systems, particularly against concerns of austerity. Hence, in the face of these struggles, there is a tendency to perhaps overemphasize the success of small wins while turning a blind eye towards some of the dark sides that come with these wins, or other regressive developments on complementary fronts. We might think, for example, of celebrated expansions of minimalist and narrowly targeted cash transfer programmes, pursued as part of broader agendas of pushing for much larger ‘reforms’ in social security systems or privatization in education or health systems, as consistently promoted by the World Bank, the IMF and other IFIs — even if by stealth under the banner of so-called ‘universal coverage’.⁷ Indeed, despite recent public relations attempts to signal support for universal social protection by both the IMF and the World Bank,⁸ these reform agendas were reiterated in

6. See for example: Blofield and Martinez Franzoni (2015); Cookson (2018); Fine (2014); Jensen and Tyler (2015); Jones (2016); Kidd and Athias (2019); Lavinias (2013, 2017, 2018); Molyneux (2008); Molyneux et al. (2016); Palacio Ludeña (2019); Saad-Filho (2015); Schild (2007); Wacquant (2009).

7. See Klees et al. (2019) on the World Bank’s position on education, as expressed in the 2018 *World Development Report*. Also see Clegg (Assessment, this issue) on the IMF’s position on social protection and Meagher (Assessment, this issue) on the 2019 *World Development Report*.

8. IMF (2019: 11) specifies that ‘consultations were held with various groups to discuss the scope of the paper, including . . . CSOs, trade unions and academics’. As a participant in two of these ‘consultations’ (the ITUC and LSE conferences in 2018), I am able to attest to the

the World Bank White Paper by Packard et al. (2019). Baunach et al. (2019) clarify that this White Paper proposes that coverage in social protection systems should be extended by rolling back existing rights and protections for workers, in terms of both social security and labour market protections, including increasing labour market flexibility, limiting minimum wage increases, reducing employers' responsibilities for financing social security, and increasing regressive forms of taxation such as value added tax. It is perhaps no coincidence that such measures have been taken up by the far-right government of Bolsonaro in Brazil, for instance, whose attacks on social and political liberalism are often excused in the financial press for producing 'major policy achievements' (Stott, 2019) of public sector pension reform, as long sought by IFIs.⁹

Interestingly, these neoliberal reform agendas are usually cast in progressive, even emancipatory terms, which is where they find affinity with right-wing populism. For instance, formal social security systems are presented as elitist, exclusionary, inegalitarian and patriarchal.¹⁰ The fact that they often do match these qualifications provides some empirical legitimacy to IFI reform agendas. Bugra (this issue) and Gudavarthy and Vijay (this issue) discuss precisely this point in the cases of Turkey and India, in terms of how the right-wing governments of Erdogan and Modi cultivate discourses characterizing formal social security regimes as part of an elitist, secular and authoritarian legacy, as opposed to notions of populist governance that nonetheless continue to advance neoliberal agendas.

The risk is that such logics are used to justify reducing standards of public social provisioning down to their lowest common denominator, whilst not addressing the fundamental sources of social stratification and segregation that drive exclusionary forms of development in the first place. Moreover, they can be seen as having continued to reproduce social differentiation on increasingly neoliberal logics. Viewed through this lens of social policy, right-wing populism can be understood as not contradictory to neoliberalism, but in many ways advancing it.

warming of both the IMF and World Bank representatives to a discourse of universal social protection, although questions still remained about how 'universal' was to be interpreted. IMF (2019) is typically evasive on such matters, in terms of providing any substantive policy specifications. However, its position as described above has become very apparent in subsequent country programmes, such as in Ecuador, Argentina, Nigeria, etc.

9. In *The Financial Times*, Stott (2019) forgives Bolsonaro's attacks on social and political liberalism, given that '[he] finally produced major policy achievements', winning 'decisive backing from the lower house of the National Congress for a plan to rein in the cost of Brazil's unaffordable public sector pensions'.

10. See, for example, Levy (2008); from the more critical camp, Molyneux (2006) argues that social provisioning in Latin America during *Cepalismo* maintained gendered conceptions of social needs along familial, patriarchal and paternalist lines.

NEOLIBERALISM REDUX

These affinities between neoliberalism and right-wing populism highlight the challenges of defining neoliberalism, broadly understood as the interventionist and utopic political project of instituting laissez-faire or self-regulating capitalism. Several authors in this Debate have taken up the task, in particular Kiely, whose contribution focuses almost entirely on this point, as well as Putzel, who ties it more explicitly to the theme of social policy. Kiely, citing Davies (2014), Mirowski (2013) and himself (Kiely, 2018), stresses that neoliberalism needs to be understood precisely in terms of its interventionist logic, as a project designed to extend the market to all spheres of society. He refers to this as ‘the neoliberal paradox’ (Kiely, 2018), in the sense that neoliberalism actually deploys and extends much of the state’s Weberian bureaucratic rationalization for this purpose, despite its anti-statist ideology. This incoherence allows for the constant renewal of the interventionist project. In this respect, his argument echoes the iconic phrase of Karl Polanyi (1944), whom he cites and discusses, that laissez-faire is planned, whereas planning is not.

Indeed, one might add that this incoherence often trips up critical development studies, especially the more post-structuralist variants. A fundamental problem with much of the post-development critique is that, in their reaction to the oppressiveness of state projects of development, scholars often carry an implicit anti-statist bias, to the extent of rejecting state-led redistributive projects given their inevitable elements of social engineering. In the confused blurring between statist development strategies and neoliberal strategies that claim to advance development (even if they often do not), this critical anti-statism from the Left can inadvertently feed into the neoliberal agenda. Kiely (this issue) even notes that it can feed into right-wing populism, given the common distrust of the expert, which both share with neoliberal theories of knowledge. Putzel (this issue) also discusses this point with regard to the vilification of the state and the rejection of scientific expertise. The ingrained problem is that the rejection of statism does not necessarily guide us in emancipatory directions. As Barbara Harriss-White (2002) argues, while state regulation might be imperfect, the alternative is never non-regulation, but regulation through other, usually more regressive social structures. Anti-statism in this sense distracts from the crucial understanding of states as sites of social struggle and conflict, which needs to be embraced in order for progressive agendas and political movements to have any traction.

Moreover, the confusion that right-wing populism might represent the death of neoliberalism is arguably based on overlooking reactionary elements within neoliberalism itself. Reactionary in this sense refers to a fundamental orientation of seeking to maintain and bolster the position and power of the traditional ruling classes, as argued by Kari Polanyi Levitt with respect to fascism in the 1930s (Fischer and Polanyi Levitt, 2019). The

neoliberal project aligns with this through its own fundamental orientation towards the protection of private property rights (and their free creation and use, particularly financial assets), which belies its reactionary nature in a world where most wealth and power is inherited rather than earned. The neoliberal ideology obscures this nature through a radical discourse of freedom, and yet its conservative impulse to preserve the prevailing social order sets it in stark contrast to classical liberalism, which was much more revolutionary in seeking to undo the old aristocratic social order. In this respect, neoliberalism is not necessarily in tension with illiberal right-wing populism despite its advocacy of political liberalism, given that both contain this similar reactionary impulse. The fact that right-wing populism seeks to substitute a revolutionary solidarity of class with a conservative solidarity of nation or racial group — similar to classic fascism, as noted by Polanyi Levitt (*ibid.*) — serves the neoliberal project well in terms of undermining collective class mobilizations that might challenge the power of capital.

This conservative or even reactionary impulse is poignantly expressed in neoliberal approaches to social policy. These are generally oriented towards disciplining (or at best incentivizing) the behaviour of poor people through segregated (and poor quality) systems of provisioning, often done in punitive ways that are almost Victorian in nature. This is regularly presented as promoting the rights of the poor, which is a common confusion of rhetoric for reality in the literature. At the (unfortunately common) extreme, these approaches morph into a form of neo-eugenics, as often observed in some of the more egregious uses and abuses of randomized control trials (RCTs).¹¹ The use of behavioural nudges in particular appeals to a conservative impulse that prefers disciplining poor people rather than redistributing wealth and power towards them. The idea that more (impact) can be made with less (spending) is ideally adapted to agendas of everlasting austerity. It also appeals to what is considered in Foucauldian terms as a form of neoliberal governmentality, referring to technologies of power for governing populations through discourses and norms of self-regulation or self-discipline, with the aim of making oneself entrepreneurial and fit to engage in markets. While such interventionist and segregationist impulses are not particularly liberal — at least not the post-war social democratic version of liberalism expounded by Amartya Sen among others — they fit comfortably with the

11. Indeed, Hoffman (2018) shows that many of these studies — including those by Banerjee, Duflo and Kremer, the winners of the 2019 Swedish Central Bank Prize in Economics in Honour of Alfred Noble — contain strong anti-union and labour casualization biases, while also exhibiting an anti-empirical stance towards the longer-term implications of policies informed by these biases. This notably ties them quite decidedly into neoliberal agendas despite their pretence of being ideology- and even theory-free. In a subsequent survey of RCTs, Hoffman (2019) makes a compelling argument that the common disregard for informed consent in these social experiments on poor and vulnerable people not only increases risks of unintended harm but also establishes continuities with colonial social experimentation. Also see Muller et al. (2019).

similarly segregationist impulse of illiberal right-wing populism. While the latter targets its discipline at racial or other groups rather than at generic categories of poor people, the fact that poverty is often racialized allows for a smooth transition between these two conceptual targets.

In a similar sense, there is not necessarily a contradiction, as is often assumed, between neoliberalism on the one hand and the rise of modern and political forms of religious conservatism or fundamentalism on the other, as observed in the US, Latin America, Turkey, India and elsewhere. Indeed, religious or spiritual notions of self-discipline can easily code-switch and transmute into a logic of neoliberal governmentality, as noted for instance with respect to contemporary practices of yoga (Godrej, 2017) and mindfulness meditation (Cohen, 2017; Forbes, 2017; Purser, 2019). Buğra (2015) similarly points out that a conservative ethic is manifest in Friedrich Hayek's conception of economic liberalism, which he argued must be underpinned with strong moral order. His vision was not one of complete libertarianism, but rather of strong systems of moral conduct necessary to provide the social and institutional mooring for free markets to function effectively in the context of minimalist states. Kiely (this issue) highlights a similar point, citing the work of Melinda Cooper (2017), who demonstrates through the history of the poor laws in the US that the liberal ethos was always underpinned by the imperative of family and kinship obligations, which carries through to the present in the relationship between neoliberals and social conservatives. Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton (this issue) give more precise examples in the cases of Croatia, Hungary and Poland, in terms of how social policy has been an 'important arena of struggle for a hegemonic moral economy, a shifting domain where radical restructurings of social provisioning and social ordering take place', which is 'not entirely understandable in terms of the concept of "neoliberalism", but impossible to understand without it'. Gudavarthy and Vijay (this issue) argue in the case of India that the new imagination of populist governance rooted in majoritarian Hindu nationalism has served to advance economic agendas of neoliberalism. The emergence of neo-Confucianism in China, as noted by Duckett (this issue), could be seen as offering a similar function of asserting an elitist and conservative conception of moral order that nonetheless holds popular appeal, thereby serving to buttress what Duckett calls 'neoliberal-looking' economic policies.

The irony recognized across all of the Debate contributions is that, as noted above, despite these associations between neoliberalism and right-wing populism, the latter has been much more successful than the Left at capturing social and political reactions against neoliberalism (with some exceptions). In this regard, Keily and Buğra both evoke the Polanyian concept of double movement. As mentioned earlier, this refers to the work of Karl Polanyi (1944), who theorized that the creation of market society (or capitalism) involved dialectical processes: on one hand, self-regulating markets are extended by states in a planned manner, while on the other hand, societies respond in spontaneous ways to control and tame the dislocations

brought about through such extensions, or what Putzel (2002) refers to as the ‘impulse for social protection’ (not referring to the meaning of social protection that has come to be used in social policy scholarship). A more liberal scholarship has come to interpret this as a pendular movement of history (e.g. Stewart, 2009; see a good survey of this in Goodwin, 2018). However, more Marxian readings emphasize a particular identification of systemic crisis within capitalism, albeit one that locates the breaking points as first occurring within the social and political contradictions of capitalism, rather than in the economic contradictions as per conventional Marxism. Nor did Polanyi necessarily think that the double movement could redeem capitalism, insofar as attempts to re-embed market society would be invariably unstable and crisis-prone, especially if, in the process, society remains commodified.¹²

Related to this, another key point that distinguishes Polanyi from conventional Marxism is his emphasis that there is no particular class or ideological bias in the ensuing social reactions. In other words, the social protection impulse can take on revolutionary, reformist, as well as conservative or reactionary manifestations. Kiely (this issue) intimates this point by suggesting that rising right-wing populism might well be a Polanyian moment, but one directed towards social conservatism. Indeed, this is one problem with the thesis of Nancy Fraser (2013): she attributes the inability of progressive social movements to mount a coherent countermovement to neoliberalism to a lack of Polanyian political logic, even whilst rising right-wing populist movements in many parts of the world have been precisely confirming this political logic — just not in ways that progressives would prefer.

As a case in point, Karl Polanyi used his optic to understand the emergence of fascism, socialism and the New Deal in the 1930s (a point that Fraser alludes to, but then does not carry through to the rest of her article, perhaps given her emancipatory intent). Similar to Hannah Arendt (1951), Polanyi pointed out that support for Nazism often came from lower-middle and middle classes in the smaller cities and towns of Germany, emphasizing again the broader cross-class character of the impulse and the fact that dislocations are felt across social hierarchies, in different ways but with politically important congealing effects.¹³ As noted above, to the extent that such movements express nativist and racist but nonetheless strong ideas of moral order, or imagined revivals of moral order, they could be seen as impulses for controlling the dislocating effects of neoliberalism, even whilst enforcing notions of social order as a functional basis for further extending or deepening neoliberalism.

12. For this understanding of Polanyi’s work and its associated debates, I am indebted to numerous conversations on the topic with his daughter, Kari Polanyi Levitt, as well as my participation in many Polanyi conferences.

13. See Fischer (2007, 2008b) for an application of this optic in relation to minority relations in Western China.

These reflections are important precisely because, while the rise of right-wing populism and various forms of authoritarianism might well be understood as double movements in response to neoliberal reforms, they are not necessarily in antipathy with neoliberalism. It is precisely this contradiction that provides them with their especially virulent nature, particularly as the conservative ideological impulse implicit or explicit within both neoliberalism and new-right reactions carries the propensity to become increasingly disciplinary and punitive. The continuous refinements of targeting devices in the realm of social protection, for instance, carry this propensity, as does the deployment of behavioural research on poor people, as noted above.

The irony is that many of these targeting systems were developed by erstwhile 'New Left' governments, such as in the US, the UK and Latin America. Putzel (this issue) discusses this point at length with regard to the 'mature' phase of neoliberalism from the mid-1990s onwards, based on the increasing use of targeted programmes that have not contradicted the market-orientation of neoliberal strategies. Riggirozzi (this issue) implies this point in highlighting the potential for the earlier targeted and precariously funded schemes introduced during the Latin American 'Pink Tide' to undermine legitimacy and inclusive democracy. Gudavarthy and Vijay (this issue) similarly note that a reversion to targeted programmes under Modi in India has served the double purpose of rejecting the ideas of universal social security that had gained currency under the previous regime — at least rhetorically, given that targeting remained the dominant mode of social assistance under that regime — while at the same time appealing to the idea of weeding-out outsiders deemed non-deserving of such targeted assistance.

These arguments also clarify why social policy is often singled out by the socio-political reactions to neoliberalism, which have not necessarily been directed towards neoliberal economic policy per se but towards the liberal social and cultural policies with which it has been associated. This propensity is particularly emphasized by Putzel (this issue), in terms of how social policy has served as one of the primary symbols of the contradictions of this form of 'inclusive neoliberalism' (Porter and Craig, 2004). These symbols are based on recognition of the rights of women, minorities, migrants and the poor (or of 'diversity'), but in the absence of strong redistributive or labour-protecting policies, and in the presence of austerity in public provisioning. From these contradictions, the conservative populist reaction has been directed at these symbols of social liberalism, thereby reinforcing the scapegoating of particular groups or individuals, and making popular resentments susceptible to racist and misogynist messages of right-wing populists. For instance, arguments have been made during healthcare reform debates in the US that the private insurance system has not been working well because of abuse of the system by illegal migrants, not because of any deficiency with the model per se. Similarly, arguments have been made that the erosion of the welfare state in Scandinavia is the result of a breakdown of homogeneity due to migration, thereby undermining the foundation of social solidarity that

is essential to the model. Such narratives and the increasingly exclusionary practices of social policy that have accompanied these narratives — or what Putzel (this issue) calls ‘discourses and authoritarian practices of social exclusion’ — thereby serve as distractions from ongoing intensification of neo-liberal economic policy, such as trade and investment liberalization, labour market deregulation, fiscal austerity and the marketization of the state.

INVERSIONS ON THE PERIPHERIES

In her discussion of the Turkish case, Buğra (this issue) also offers a crucial twist that is fundamental to understanding how the relationship between neoliberalism and rising right-wing populism needs to be interpreted differently in peripheral, late industrializing settings, as opposed to how it has acted out in the centres of global capitalism. She emphasizes how the development of social policy in late industrializing countries followed an inverse process compared to the industrial centres. In the latter, the expansion of social assistance was a precursor to formal social security regimes in 19th century Europe, as epitomized by the poor laws of England, which preceded the development of modern social security systems. Of course, some might argue that these poor laws were so punitive and even penal that they are barely worth considering as equivalent to modern social assistance. Nonetheless, following Buğra’s argument, formal (contributory) social security systems in late industrializing countries came first, before the systematic state-led adoptions of (‘non-contributory’) social assistance targeted at the poor and/or informal. While social assistance programmes have had a long history in many developing countries, they have tended to be fragmented, piecemeal, underfunded and not prioritized by states. The more systemic expansion of social assistance that has been characteristic of the ‘New Poverty Agenda’ of the 1990s (e.g. Lipton et al., 1992) and then the social protection agenda from the 2000s onwards has therefore taken place within a polarized context, against a wall of already well-developed and formalized social security institutions.¹⁴

This simple but profound insight is important because it points to a fundamentally different development dynamic in these peripheries than what might be inferred from an interpretative lens that draws from the history of the industrial centres. In this, it has much in common with the Latin American structuralist tradition, particularly the work of Celso Furtado, who noted a similar inversion in processes of industrialization.¹⁵ In this sense, care must be taken in interpreting right-wing support for various aspects of

14. Barrientos (2019) also makes this point with respect to the Bismarckian social insurance model in Latin America.

15. See Furtado (1983). For a discussion that places this more broadly within structuralist approaches to development economics, see Fischer (2015).

social assistance in developing countries, given that its political logic likely differs considerably from how similar dynamics occur in European welfare states that tend to dominate our thinking on such issues. The recent expansions of social assistance in developing countries, for instance, often play a role in broader multipronged strategies of reforming (retrenching) formal social security systems or more broad-based subsidy programmes (as continuously lobbied by the IMF, as noted above), within contexts where labour markets are already very flexible (informal employment is by definition already unregulated, at least with respect to formal public forms of regulation). Moreover, this ties in with right-wing critiques of labour aristocracies, or the idea that social security coverage is highly unequal, covering only a minority of workers in most developing countries, and that any minimalist expansion of social assistance therefore represents a net progressive gain. In contrast, neoliberal reform agendas in the North focus on the fact that wide sections of the population have access to relatively generous social security and assistance, which presents a major obstacle to deregulating labour markets. The euphoria over the extension of quite narrowly targeted social protection in developing countries is therefore informed by an important misinterpretation, as if the advance of social assistance in the South is somehow the antithesis of attempts to restrict it in the North.

Instead, the synergy between social policy expansion and ‘illiberal politics’ in many parts of the world needs to be understood from this inverse perspective of what might be called late welfare state development. For instance, Bugra (this issue) argues that this new form of ‘illiberal politics’ in Turkey has been based on a strategy of polarization that derives its relevance from the contrast between the non-egalitarian and exclusionary character of the country’s former social security system, versus the inclusionary elements in the instruments and policies introduced by the AKP government. In this manner, the foundational principle of secularism has been attacked as authoritarian and as hostile to popular Islamic values and sentiment, thereby undermining the criticisms by labour unions, professional associations and women’s organizations — all associated as part of this secular, elitist and authoritarian legacy — of the creeping marketization and privatization in the health and pension systems pursued by the AKP government. This strategy of polarization reverses the attack by stoking hostility among the disadvantaged masses against labour organizations, portraying them as defenders of the privileged labour aristocracy. In contrast, the expansion of social assistance has been marked by references to Islamic culture and framed as charity. This legitimizes the many different types of irregular, discretionary and in-kind assistance provided to the poor by public institutions, while delegitimizing the critical voices calling for proper rights-based schemes, as advocated by many on the Left.

Similarly, Gudavarthy and Vijay (this issue) emphasize how the Right in India cultivated a political narrative that attacked the secular institutions of development planning and policy as elitist, while combining this with

market-oriented reforms. Secularism — portrayed as socially liberal by this Right — has been contrasted with a new imagination of an anti-establishment populist governance that appeals to the popular demands generated in the course of political mobilization. The subsumption of social policy into this narrative, as one of its principal symbols and fields of engagement, has thereby reinforced the pursuit of what Gudavarthy and Vijay refer to as an ‘exclusivist-authoritarian right-wing agenda’, or what might be referred to as an illiberal form of hierarchical inclusion, in contrast to the (neo)liberal imaginaries of social inclusion, as discussed further below.

The fact that these extensions of social assistance do not necessarily lead to universalistic trajectories — as often hoped for — is taken up by Ramos (this issue) and Duckett (this issue). In her discussion of the Philippines, Ramos notes how the social policy expansion under President Duterte, which at best could be considered a very narrow form of ‘universalism’ (defined mostly in terms of coverage, regardless of modalities),¹⁶ has been deployed to institutionally entrench the already-existing deep segmentation of social provisioning. The expansion has nonetheless proved functional and appealing across the political spectrum and has been used to legitimize a conservative and authoritarian political order, thereby subverting the potential for transformative social change.

In her discussion of China, Duckett provides a similarly sobering view on social policy changes in that country, which also have been often celebrated as part of a Southern revolutionary long march towards universalism. These social policy developments, which include new social old-age, health and unemployment insurances, guarantees of nine years of free public education, and means-tested income support for the poorest households, have extended entitlements to hitherto excluded sections of the population and somewhat eroded long-standing urban–rural divides. However, they have been introduced in an underfunded manner, delivering only meagre support, and parallel to rather than widening participation in existing and much more generous social programmes, as enjoyed by the urban elites, middle classes and formal sector workers. As a result, they have reinforced segmented provisioning and, Duckett argues, are regressive overall, doing little to reduce income inequalities. She clarifies the political logic of these social policy expansions as facilitating economic marketization and privatization through attempts to prevent public dissatisfaction, which the Chinese Communist Party has managed through authoritarian controls over media, civil society and union activity. These have enabled the Party-state to claim universal coverage and policy progressivity while limiting demands for greater redistribution. Duckett asserts a notion that these policy developments emerge from the ‘neoliberal-looking’ character of policies in China, which have prioritized marketization and privatization over a revival of universalistic

16. On this understanding of universalism, see Fischer (2012, 2018) and Martinez Franzoni and Sanchez-Ancochea (2016).

social rights following the collapse of the more rudimentary universalism of Maoist social policy in the early reform era.

EXCLUSIONARY IDENTITY POLITICS, HIERARCHICAL INCLUSIONS AND PATRIARCHAL FAMILIALISM

Several other common themes stand out strongly in the invited contributions of this Debate section. Prominent among these is the emergence of exclusionary identity politics, as discussed by most of the authors. Kiely emphasizes this point with respect to nativism and racism, especially in the European and North American contexts. In speaking for a symbolic ‘people’, right-wing populism has tended to dehumanize those considered ‘non-peoples’, thereby excluding them from the democratic calculus of representation. In the European and North American contexts, these strategies mostly target immigration and multiculturalism, and stoke the idea that liberal elites have betrayed the imagined ‘native populations’, which notably draws from fascist playbooks of the 1930s. More specifically addressing the cases of Croatia, Hungary and Poland, Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton describe how different combinations of authoritarianism, neoliberalism and conservatism have come to hold hegemonic positions with the states of each country. Social policy has crucially been expanded for so-called ‘deserving’ citizens or ‘loyal’ interest groups, such as the ‘good Croats’, ‘good Hungarians’ or ‘good Poles’, while being radically retrenched for others judged as ‘undeserving’, often in combination with punitive discipline. As a result, Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton argue that this is ‘delivering a radical new vision of social reproduction and fundamental differentiations in terms of access to social citizenship . . . occurring across complex intersectionalities of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age, disability, geographical location and, crucially, political affiliation and loyalty’. In this particular central or eastern European context, the hegemonic restructuring ‘rests, in particular, on the issues of gender politics and anti-discrimination, seen as “alien” European Union-inspired programmes imposed on nation states against the will of their citizens and politicians’.

Related to this, another common theme is hierarchical or subordinated forms of inclusion, as already emphasized above with respect to how the expansion of social protection must be conceived differently in late developing contexts. The important point here is in the ways that the exclusions, as mentioned in the previous point, form the basis for subordinated or adverse forms of inclusion.¹⁷ This theme is picked up especially by Gudavarthy and

17. See Fischer (2007, 2008a, 2011, 2018) for detailed discussions on such symbioses between exclusion and inclusion, especially under neoliberalism. Also, see du Toit (2004) on what he calls ‘adverse incorporation’ and Hickey and du Toit (2007) on what they reframe as ‘adverse incorporation and social exclusion’.

Vijay, who discuss how caste structure is approached and reframed by the current regime in India as representing skill sets and occupational groups rather than as a hierarchical, discriminatory, exclusionary and humiliating institution. This is combined with a shift in emphasis from rights-based entitlements to community-based empowerment, the latter providing a template to reinforce ‘traditional’ social hierarchies (e.g. of caste, gender, etc.). The social policy interventions that enact such conceptions are thereby presented as pragmatic approaches of hierarchical inclusion, supporting the development of occupation-related skills among caste groups associated with these occupations, in contrast to the ineffective promises of transformation in class, caste and gender relations that had been made by the previous regime in a context of highly uneven economic opportunities.

A third common theme is related to gender politics and relations, as already mentioned several times. This specifically refers to the rise and/or reassertion of patriarchal ideologies and practices of familialism (or neo-familialism), and the deployment of various social policies to powerfully reshape gender relations along these lines. Several of the case studies present this as part of the multipronged attack on liberal elitism. Indeed, Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton (this issue) relate this to how a renewed heteronormative familialism, ‘repatriarchalization’ and religious revival in contemporary Croatia, Hungary and Poland have played key roles in the authoritarian and neoliberal government projects of producing targeted and systematic divisions, insecurity and abandonment. The reactive aspects of this opposition to so-called ‘gender ideology’ take the form of protests against the Istanbul Convention on domestic violence, an aggressive reassertion of heteronormativity, and attempts to restrict abortion. The more constructive aspects rest on complex sets of policies that are framed in terms of seeing women as primarily wives and mothers, even while allowing for their subordinated participation in labour markets.

Moreover, Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton argue that the responsibility of national and ethnicized demographic renewal is placed heavily on women. This connects these gender politics with anti-immigrant sentiments — or what Putzel (this issue) refers to as the legitimization of misogynist and racist discourse — as well as with ‘welfare chauvinism’ and a growing role for church-based forces in social policy. It might be pointed out that this emphasis on ‘demographic renewal’ entails some degree of cognitive dissonance given the fact that fertility rates in these countries are some of the lowest in the world. For instance, according to current UN estimates (UN, 2019), the total fertility rate in the 2015–20 period was 1.45 for Croatia, 1.49 for Hungary, and 1.42 for Poland. Some sort of deep social contradiction within these ideological politics is therefore bound to emerge, particularly given that the high rates of emigration from these countries further undermine the ability of familialist social policies to engender (pun intended) a nativist demographic renewal. Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton implicitly acknowledge this point in arguing that the renewed ‘radical repatriarchalization forms

part of an authoritarian neoliberal response to a wider crisis of social reproduction, connecting nationalism, patriarchy, the heteronormative family and religion’.

Buğra (this issue) also analyses very similar themes in the case of Turkey, as already mentioned above in terms of the polarizing discourses used against women’s organizations. Within these discourses, there is a strong emphasis on women’s ‘natural’ difference as the basis of gender roles in Islamic culture. This is then actualized through familialistic social policies that seek to confine women to a position of care providers. Buğra refers to this as ‘state-supported familialism’, which is different from the old familialism that involved a more passive, neglectful role of the secular state in traditional family relations. In the newer familialism, state policies have actively subsidized women’s domestic social care roles through ‘different types of family support policies [that] have now become important in the expanded realm of social assistance’ (citing Akkan, 2018), such as transfers made to poor families for the care-at-home of the disabled, elderly and children, with women ‘naturally’ appearing as care providers. Such approaches can be seen as means to deal with the crisis in social reproduction that neoliberalism has exacerbated. At the same time, they limit the commodification of female labour and contributing to the exclusion of women from working life, in conformity with the conservative outlook of the AKP, by subsidizing women’s position in the gender division of roles within traditional family relations.

CONCLUSION: OMINOUS POTENTIAL FUTURES OF SOCIAL POLICY

As an ominous concluding note to this Debate section Introduction,¹⁸ the revival of segregationism is one of the pervasive issues emerging within the convergence of existing social policy agendas and practices under neoliberalism and the rise of right-wing politics. Many of the Debate articles shed light on this, whether explicitly or implicitly. Segregationism refers to the intellectual and policy proclivity to single out and segregate groups of people defined according to poverty, race, ethnicity, religion, gender or other social markers from the rest of society as the objects of public (state or non-state) charity, or else as objects of an active construction of social differentiation. Stratification and segregation have of course been inherent to social provisioning systems since time immemorial — a common observation in the field of social policy. Nonetheless, the legitimacy of segregation was on the defensive for several post-war decades and the goal of universalism was at least the target of most countries, even if only achieved by a few. However, there has been a more recent reassertion of segregation as accepted best practice,

18. This concluding section draws from the conclusion of Fischer (2018).

or at least second-best practice given the perceived impossibilities of integrating large informal sectors into existing social security systems and/or of universalizing the latter,¹⁹ even though the very retreat from such long-term objectives was arguably a crucial contributing factor to the exacerbation of informality in the first place.

Social protection for the informal is then turned into an issue of charity or unilateral redistributive transfers, as is suggested by the now-accepted terminology of ‘non-contributory’ social protection (which is a factually inaccurate term because the poor do contribute to the state revenues that pay for these transfers, albeit not directly through contributions to formally defined social security institutions). Indeed, this association of social protection with charity is emphasized by several of the contributions to this Debate section, particularly with reference to religiously informed right-wing ideologies. The appeal is that such segregationist tendencies appear progressive, populist and so-called ‘pro-poor’, to the extent that isolating the poor is justified in order to better concentrate resources and interventions on them and to filter out the undeserving and the un-needy. This is in contrast to the perceived deservingness of social security contributors, rentiers or those who make profits, which leads to an increasingly smug protectionism from them towards the encroachment of poor people into their benefits.

However, the dual pressures to both ‘reform’ (i.e. retrench) social security systems and to refine the targeting of social protection for the poorest, reinforces the tendency in most parts of the world for a very large uncovered and unsecured middle, typically the middle three quintiles of the population, as discussed for instance by ILO (2017; see Alfery and Moussié, Assessment, this issue). Indeed, this point brings us back to the observation that the impulse for rising new-right movements generally derives precisely from such middle strata of the population. These are not necessarily ‘middle classes’ (except by intellectually vacuous World Bank definitions) and many would be classified as poor, near-poor or vulnerable in many countries, particularly poorer countries. The reasons why such social strata would line up with right-wing political agendas that simultaneously exacerbate their insecurity — as dramatically highlighted in the December 2019 UK elections — continues to be a major challenge for social theory. However, the situation is arguably similar to the first decades of the 20th century when workers of the world did not unite, but instead rallied behind their respective national ruling classes, only to be twice sent out to slaughter each other.

It might be argued that this tendency has been counteracted by the increasing acceptance of the idea of a Social Protection Floor, as recently adopted by the UN, which asserts that a basic universal minimum can be set and that receiving it is a question of rights, not charity. As noted earlier, even the World Bank and the IMF have seemed to come around to the idea of

19. See this view, for example, in Levy (2008, 2018) and tentatively in Barrientos (2019).

universalism. However, as argued by Fischer (2012, 2018) and Martinez Franzoni and Sanchez-Ancochea (2016), of crucial importance is the extent to which the idea of universalistic social policy has been watered down to its most minimalist connotation (as is common in UN and ILO positions) or appropriated by agendas that are not, in reality, particularly universalistic (as with the World Bank positioning). In the case of the World Bank, ‘universalism’ is generally conceived as being achieved as long as everyone has access to something, regardless of how this is provided. In other words, even if the middle and upper classes access health and education services privately, and have access to generous social security benefits, in contrast to poor people who access poorly funded and poor-quality public systems of provisioning, this would be considered to be a ‘universal’ system.²⁰ This interpretation is also implicit in the special issue of *The Economist* (2018) on universal healthcare. It thereby includes the vast swath of private provisioning in health and education to the unsecured middle 50–60 per cent of populations in most lower- and middle-income countries as part of a ‘universal’ provisioning system (the same applies to private insurance systems as part of universal social protection, etc.). Given that almost all systems, even in the poorest countries, usually have at least some very rudimentary public health and schooling systems for the poorest, alongside private provisioning for anyone who can afford it, this makes it very easy to prematurely celebrate the achievement of universal health and education for all, as has become a common platitude to which even UN and ILO conventions have often succumbed.²¹ Such sleights of narrative are impressive in the way that they co-opt or hijack progressive concepts, although they do not refute that fact that, within these agendas, targeting through segregated systems of provisioning continues to be promoted. Indeed, it is even packaged as part of a rights-based agenda whereby targeting poor people somehow plays a role in enacting rights-based entitlements to social protection.²²

In contrast, the segregationist tendencies actually practised in neoliberal approaches to social policy, and the ways that right-wing populist movements have adopted and extended these practices, clearly emerge from conservative impulses to preserve the existing hierarchical social order and to discipline those who find themselves subordinate within this order. As such, they have deep and long-lasting consequences on social inequalities, on conceptions and practices of citizenship, on dynamics of formality/informality, and on trajectories of development more generally. These consequences need to be

20. This precise definition of universalism was explained to me by the social protection expert of a country office of the World Bank in Asia during fieldwork in March 2018 (country undisclosed for reasons of confidentiality).

21. Again, see Martinez Franzoni and Sanchez-Ancochea (2016) for some excellent discussion and examples of this.

22. See Fischer (2013) for a discussion of the ambiguity of rights-based approaches along these lines.

taken into account as we ponder the possibilities of post-neoliberal futures within contexts of entrenched high inequality and increasingly reactionary politics, in which segregationism may turn out to be far more endemic and enduring than neoliberal forms of governance.

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